THE KENWORTHYS

MARGARET WILSON

LIBRARY
Brigham Young University
RARE BOOK COLLECTION
PS
3545
.I66
K4
1925
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY
3 1197 23010 1849

813
W6944k

THE KENWORTHYS

By

Margaret Wilson

Author of
"THE ABLE McLAUGHLINS"
Pulitzer Prize award 1924
Winner Harpers' Prize Novel
Competition 1923

Harper & Brothers, Publishers
New York and London
1925

THE KENWORTHYS

Copyright, 1925
By Harper & Brothers
Printed in the U. S. A.

First Edition
F-Z

THE LIBRARY
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY
PROVO, UTAH

THE KENWORTHYS

Chapter One

EMILY FISKE glanced up from her paper and saw her aunt in the hall, ready to go out.

"Auntie!" she cried. "What are you going to do with that book?"

Mrs. Alden did not approve of her tone. She stopped and turned on Emily a long and competent look.

"I am returning it."

The censured volume was *The Damnation of Theron Ware.*

"Oh, let me do that! I'll take it back. *I* borrowed it!"

"You did indeed! I looked into it again. I came upon a passage really blasphemous."

"You might as well let me finish it. I've read past that."

"I want your young friend"— Emily hated that term and its tone—"to understand that she needn't trouble to lend you more. We have enough reading matter in the house of our own."

"There isn't a book in this house I haven't read four times."

"Don't be peevish, Emily. You exaggerate. The habit's growing on you. I'm sure you haven't read half the books in this house twice. I don't believe you've read a third of them twice. There are a good many books in this house you have

never seen, for that matter. As soon as I have time I intend looking over your father's books in the attic, to see if any of them are suitable for you."

Mrs. Alden was at the hall door. So Emily, hoping to induce her to disappear through it, said as politely as she could:

"Thank you, Auntie."

Mrs. Alden turned from her sulking niece and looked around her well-behaved living room, from her respected chairs to her cherished carpet, from her adored sofa to her revered secretary. She glanced through the wide doors of the back parlor into the dining room, to the sideboard which seemed to reassure her soul by the perfection of its chaste old lines, and, like a woman fortified against the unpleasant incidents of nieces, she left the house in her usual superior manner.

Emily sighed savagely. Sighing was an inadequate expression of her feelings. She wished she could growl. She wanted to bite. But how can a girl bite—how can she bite an aunt who has departed for the afternoon? She settled down into sullenness, uncomfortably. For it was July of 1904, and hot in that Illinois town, and in 1904 smart young persons wore very high stiff collars with their large-sleeved shirtwaists, and heavy pleated "golf skirts" which quite shockingly cleared the floor by an inch or two, leaving their very feet exposed. And well-brought-up young ladies read only what they were permitted to read—openly—and what they pleased to read they read privately and stealthily.

So Emily sat still, potentially growling and biting, from time to time easing her neck from the pressure of that great stiff collar with her fingers. Even when she sulked she was an attractive girl, with pleasant gray eyes, a good color, and soft brown hair skillfully arranged over a great "rat" into a stiff

pompadour. And she sat there obviously resenting her situation, obviously having the habit of resenting it.

Then after a little, and suddenly, she changed—as the dismal world changes when the sun breaks into clear shining after rain. She glowed, and she softened. The stiff sleeves of her shirt-waist remained stiff, and the collar didn't wilt perceptibly. But around her young red mouth little dimples twinkled, and under her long eyelashes her eyes chuckled and sparkled.

And that was all because she had recalled Jim Kenworthy. The thought of Jim made the world, quite literally, new. Oh, after all, what did such a small thing as her aunt matter? That was all to be over and done with. She was to get away. She was to begin again, begin living, from her new birth, as it were, with her new life, her lover. She had found Jim—so recently—and now for a foolish minute, provoked by her negligible aunt, she had forgotten him and fallen from that heaven of dreams they had made together. Everything was right now. All her lonely life she had wanted approval, and now Jim had happened along—he had found her—beamed upon her with approval intensified—with adoration. She had wanted a little warmth about her, and Jim was ardent, his love was hot. She had wanted the caresses other children got naturally at home, and Jim had laid his dear, gentle hands on her, he had put his arm possessingly about her, he had kissed all her face! She had never fully lived until this week.

The memory of those hours made her beautiful. She sat gloatingly reproaching herself for having forgotten Jim for her aunt even for a moment. Suppose, for instance, she should really forget beyond recall one of those hours. Suppose she should even forget last Friday evening when she saw his boat coming down the river, to where she stood under the willow—

saw him coming toward her only an interesting male stranger, whom she recognized calmly as Mrs. Kenworthy's oldest son home from the city for a holiday. Suppose she should forget one of those innocent man-and-maid jestings which led up to their loving, or one of the shadows on his face as he looked curiously, amusedly, delightedly at her. Or that "date" they had made for Saturday night, or that first time he kissed her, on Sunday night, when he had had to hurry away unsatisfied to outwit her aunt. Women, of course, never forget these moments. That wouldn't be possible. Never possible for a girl like Emily Fiske, at least. And Monday evening they had had all the dusk together on the river, and some of the starlight on a secure green bank before she had had to return at the horrid early hour her aunt had set. And last night—oh, could she ever forget a moment of last night? All she wanted to do for the rest of her life was to sit still and remember what Jim had said, and what he had done, and how he had looked last night. She hadn't been able to sleep for ecstasy of that recollection. And this evening there was to be a picnic, to which she would be allowed to go, and Jim would be there, and he would manage, some way, hours with her, she knew. The way Jim managed things, the skilful, smooth, lovable way he did things . . .

And almost unconsciously she reached out and took her workbag from the table, and opened it. The white garment she unfolded from it she had begun embroidering the summer before, and she had delayed, and rebelled, and left it unfinished because her aunt had nagged her about finishing it promptly. And now that she was to be married, sometime, she fell to work upon the eyelets around the top of it as if she were kissing all the little soft faces of the future. When she had worked four eyelets, her hands fell idly into her lap and she sat dream-

ing. Her face grew serious and wistful. "Oh," she cried passionately to herself, "if only I knew! If only I could see and *know!* If only I could talk to some one about it! If there was some wise one dear enough to tell this darling secret!" How portentous a thing it must be, how terrible, to give oneself up so to a man! But yet how joyful, how heavenly! But mysterious, very, and sobering. She wished she could know. Ah, there it was striking three, and she wouldn't see Jim till eight o'clock in the evening.

Then she sat up with a start. Well, she *must* be in love! She *must* be a changed woman. If it hadn't been for Jim Kenworthy, she would have started for the attic for those boxes of books before the front gate had closed after her aunt. Here she had unaccountably let half an hour pass without going to see what books she might find. She ran up the stairs.

The attic was so intolerably hot and stuffy that nothing but the prospect of new books could have tempted her to linger there. She looked around the dusty and half-familiar relics quickly, till she saw in a gable five or six large wooden boxes, which she had vaguely wondered about when she had been allowed to peek into the storeroom. She stood looking at them covetously. She examined them carefully. They were tightly nailed up, and they stood one on top of the other, as high as her head. It seemed hopeless. But she was determined to get into them some way.

Standing indomitably before the pile, she discovered that the top box was forming a lid for the one beneath it. If she could get that upper box down, undoubtedly the second one would be her spoil. But it was a heavy box. She couldn't lift it. She might be able to push it off. But then it would fall. To be sure, it didn't look as if it would break if it did fall, but she would

never be able to get it back to its place. She didn't want her aunt to discover she'd been at the books. She got a chair. She tucked a handkerchief in the top of her smart collar, to prevent its wilting as she toiled, and climbed up and began pushing. She pushed at one end, and then at the other. The box moved inch by inch until the one below was uncovered sufficiently for her purpose. She began lifting the old papers that some one—her father, possibly—had wrapped with care around his possessions. She lost no time sentimentalizing about the sad and distant occasion upon which the books had been packed away. She never stopped to wonder why they were not still on the shelves downstairs where he must naturally have left them at his death. She simply worked away, sweltering, till she got one out.

And the very first one looked interesting. She opened it, and it was what she wanted. It was a love story. She knew about love. She wanted with all her heart to know more—to know all about it. This seemed to be one of the most loving books she had ever seen. She put it down, and laboriously pushed the top box back to its place. She couldn't get away from the heat of that attic quickly enough.

She ran down to her room, and washed her hands, and regarded herself painstakingly in the mirror. She powdered her face. She rearranged her hair with little pats, and, though no onlooker could have seen that she was materially changing her appearance, she worked away at her beautification for some minutes. Then, eagerly, she seized the book, and danced down the stairs in the way she always danced down when she was alone in the house. She did a little step at the top, and danced down four steps to the landing, to a little rhythm which the stair seemed to sing to her. On the landing she did another preparatory step or two, and sailed boundingly down the next four

steps, where she paused, cavorted, and prepared for her flight to the bottom. It was a frightfully unladylike thing to do, she knew. And that was why she did it. Conscious of the coolness of the lower rooms, she settled down in a comfortable chair in the sitting room and lost herself in the book.

She read for perhaps ten minutes. Then some one came on to the porch, some one opened the door without knocking, some one called cautiously, "Emily!" There was no other voice in the world like that one.

"Jim!" she cried, running to him, throwing herself at him. He gave one look around and abandoned caution.

"Oh, don't!" she cried. "Not here! In broad daylight! Some one—"

But he wouldn't listen. He kissed her and kissed her, drawing her into the shadow of the front-parlor portières.

"I *knew* I'd find you. Mother said she was going to the missionary meeting, and I had an idea. I walked down with her. 'God bless the heathen,' I said to myself, when I saw your aunt there! I chased myself back up here, Emily! I'm out of breath! It's better in broad daylight, when I can see what I'm touching!"

There was in that front parlor a fine Sheraton sofa. Emily had always hated it even more than the other household gods of her aunt. Its worship with the ritual of a polishing cloth on Monday was quite as regular and much more real than that of the more distant deity of the Congregational church on Sunday. But now, with Jim there to make it cozy, she sat down on it with no consciousness of ill-will toward it. A very long sofa it was. They scarcely needed the half of it for their joyous purpose. It was hidden from the door of the porch, and from it they could keep an eye on the door through which "the girl"

might enter. They sat there marveling absurdly over each other, and when it chanced that they talked of the future, she cried:

"Oh, Jim, I don't know how to cook, or anything. I don't know how to keep house. I can't even bake cakes like the other girls. I don't know how I can learn, hardly. Are you very particular about—what you eat, and everything?"

"You bet I am, Emily. I'm particular as I can be about one thing."

"What, Jim?" She was very grave.

"That you must be sitting by me when I eat it, right at my little table with me! That's my idea of heaven, Emily. You sitting there beside me—"

"Shall I tell you what's mine?" she asked, vigorously. "Mine's a place where I can do what I please! Where I can do everything I can't do here! I'll tell you right now I'm going to sit with my feet up and read. I'm going to eat with my elbows on the table! With a knife. I'm going to sing at the table whenever I want to. You wouldn't mind if I put my feet up, would you, Jim? You wouldn't try to make me behave, would you? You won't be always correcting me—?"

"Correcting you! Heavens, Emily! I'd as soon correct an angel! I'll help you sing at the table. I'll be singing duets all by myself, it'll be so nice having you."

"Oh, you sweet old silly!"

"Look at here! Don't keep calling me silly! I won't stand—"

"But you *are* silly! You're just a dear old—"

"I'm going to kiss you every time you say that. I'm going to kiss you five minutes—"

She sat erect and looked at him meditatively, cocking her head to one side.

"Oh, you are, are you?"

"Yes, I am."

She was perched provokingly on the side of the Colonial relic. She continued to look at him challengingly for a moment, and then she remarked deliberately:

"You silly old thing!" Then she took flight.

By the table in the back parlor he caught her.

"Jim, be careful!" she begged, as he held her lovely, fluttering gaiety tight. "Not right here! Jim, quit it! It's half an hour. Maggie might come in. Let me go!"

She coaxed and twisted away from him. He turned, like a man wanting relief, toward the table. Her workbag lay there, a feminine, Emily-like thing.

"This yours?" he asked, interested. He picked up the white thing with the embroidery hoops in it. "What's this?" The garment was being shaken out, disclosing its private nature.

"Oh, don't!" she cried, earnestly. Now Emily had grown up in an unusually remote and solitary virginity. She had never with retiring young brothers and sisters discussed the essential difference between nighties and pajamas between blows of nightly pillow fights. In her fortified childhood privacy, a nightdress was something one puts a dressing gown over when one gets out of bed alone, lest some one elderly female in another part of the house should by chance come upon one. She cried, with a genuine apprehensiveness:

"Don't, Jim!"

But Jim already had. The garment was exposed in its very nature before she could gather it together again in remonstrance.

He couldn't help laughing at her delicious embarrassment. She heard him chuckle as she folded it indignantly away, and blushed more adorably.

"Oh, you're a peach, Emily!" he exclaimed. "Don't you

mind. I didn't see it, honestly. It's nothing but a nightdress, is it, anyway? And *you* know, Emily—you're going to be—my—wife—"

The sentence had started off jauntily enough, with assurance, and then it had hesitated, and wavered, and shrunk away, almost in fear, so that Emily turned quickly, and Jim was standing there, looking away from her, uncomfortable.

She wondered what had happened to him. Some thought had struck him, she couldn't imagine what. Nightdresses didn't seem to confuse him. She had stuffed the garment so hastily into the silken bag that the draw strings could not close over it. She stood pressing it in, pulling the strings. She turned and looked at him again. There he stood, red with embarrassment, shame.

"What's the matter?" she asked, shyly.

And still he said nothing. She stood by the table, not far from him, the wonder of his words around her. She was going to be his—wife? She moved toward him, but he made no motion toward her. She stole a glance at him. And then she stole another. She drew close to him.

But Jim Kenworthy for once in his merry life had been overcome and bound around, his very tongue tied, and his eyes held down by a sense of his own inferiority. He was older than this girl, six years older than this child whose emotional beauty blew upon him in sudden swift gusts that uprooted, as it were, his thoughts and purposes. A certain rareness in the quality of her seized him from time to time, all of a sudden, and overpowered him. And now, from a mere gesture of hers, he had got such a sense of her remoteness from masculine purpose, so exalted a sort of innocence, that he daren't look at her, he

couldn't speak. He wondered how he had dared to say, "You're going to be my wife."

And she was drawing near him. Her arm was on his shoulder. Her arms were both around his neck. She was saying, coaxingly, "Well, are you sorry about *that?*" with her lips near his. She stretched up and kissed him, for the first time, all of her own accord.

"Sorry!" he cried. "Emily, I—I'm—not good enough for you! I'm not— You're an angel! There's no one on earth good enough for you! I don't know how I ever dared—"

"Rats!" she murmured, energetically, from the circle of his arm. "You needn't talk to *me* like that! You don't know me. I'm a perfect fiend sometimes,—when I want to be. Auntie makes me so furious I act like a—I act awful. You never spoke to your mother once in your life like I speak to auntie. I can't help it. She just makes me so mad!"

"Oh," he murmured, compassionately, "your aunt would—she'd make anybody—sore, sometimes. She don't count. You'd be an angel if you had a chance."

"I don't know. I don't think so. I think maybe—I'd rather not be."

"Oh, I wouldn't want you different. I only wish—I was worthy of you!" And on they went, for half an hour, with the usual lovers' palaver.

A neighbor came to the door then. There was no reason why any neighbor should not have seen Jim Kenworthy calling on Emily Fiske in the middle afternoon, but it pleased Emily to motion to him to sit in an unseen part of the back parlor while she got the neighbor to sit on the porch for a little. It was more exciting that way, more romantic and mysterious. And when

she got rid of the unsuspecting woman she returned triumphantly to the back parlor.

Jim meanwhile had been listening impatiently to the conversation on the porch, and it had seemed too long to be entirely triumphant. And as the caller drew out her farewells, he had risen from the chair and reached for the book which Emily had been reading. When she came back to him he had been standing for a few moments by the same table where her workbag still lay decorously shut, in absolute consternation, looking at her book.

"Whose book is this?" he demanded, confusedly, accusingly, turning toward her.

She didn't like his tone.

"It's my book!" she said, jauntily. If Jim supposed he could speak to her in that way—

"Emily!" he gasped.

"Well, what's the matter?"

"You haven't read it!"

"I certainly have!" How did he dare to look at her like that! "I've read it three times!"

Jim knew a boy who had been expelled from a Methodist school for having that book in his possession.

"Why, *Emily!*" he gasped. He got red to the top of his ears. She wasn't even ashamed of it. She wasn't even ashamed of herself, his angel!

"What's the matter?" she exclaimed, angrily.

"You don't mean you've *read* it!"

"I certainly do. Didn't I just *say* I had? You think it's not fit for me to read, I suppose! You—"

"You bet I do! It's not fit for you to touch!"

"You sound like auntie! If you think you can talk to me like that, you're mistaken. You just said—"

"Emily, I just asked you—"

"You just said I could do what I wanted to with you. You said you wouldn't—"

"I never meant—I never thought you'd read stuff like that."

"I'll read what I want to! I like that book. It's—none of your business!"

"It certainly is my business!" Then Jim made unconsciously a mistake that lasted all his life. With a gesture he put the book into his coat pocket.

"Give me my book!"

"I will not. It's no book for you." He started toward the hall. The anger that had been slowly accumulating in her heart against her aunt burst forth on him.

"Jim Kenworthy, give that book to me."

"I won't. It isn't fit for you." He was very cool.

"If you don't, I'll tell your mother you took a book out of this house without permission. I'll go and ask her for it."

"You will, will you? You won't ask her for *this* book!" He was very cool. He was scornful. He looked straight at her without love.

"Yes, I will!"

"No, you won't!" he prophesied. He was almost in the door.

"Jim, if you don't give me that book, I'll never speak to you again as long as I live."

"I don't know that I'd miss much!"

And a young man, with his long yellow hair parted smoothly in the middle, with very high color and tight trousers, walked down the sidewalk to the street, calling himself composedly a fool! He had thought her an angel. Huh! Angel! She was a

slimy little hypocrite. Blushed at the mention of a nightdress, did she, and read that book three times. And she confessed quite brazenly she liked it. Wasn't even ashamed of herself. He'd found her out. He'd been taken in. She was a sly one. Three times she had read it. He hadn't even had a chance to read it all through once himself in peace. It was always too much in surreptitious demand, handed around from lad to lad when his fraternity were lucky enough to be able to rent a copy. Emily wasn't even careful to keep it out of sight.

Jim went into his mother's little white humble house. He might have sat down in her sitting room to read the fatal volume, since she was at missionary meeting. But he went cautiously up to his own little hot room, and lay down on his bed. His mother could scarcely see to read now, and she certainly wouldn't spend what little sight she had on anything but the Bible. Just the same, Jim wasn't going to leave a book of that character around where she might possibly come upon it. There wasn't much of a place to hide things from her in that simple room. But he'd manage. He began to read it, and every time he came upon a sentence unusually bald, shocking even to him, his disgust for Emily grew. This was the sort of book she vowed openly she liked. She must know the hottest bits by heart, he reflected, cynically, if she had read it so often. What a fool he was! When he had been there with her, that very afternoon, he had had a strong and peculiar sensation of her innocence; something strange had happened to him then. He had seemed to see something almost heavenly about her. He had called her an angel! He had never seen a girl who came over him at times with such power. She had simply knocked the breath out of him. That first evening, for instance, when he had been going down to ask Mary Alliston to go for

a row with him, when he had seen her standing under that willow, bending over, looking intently into the water, she had looked so pretty that he had claimed acquaintance with her at once. "Lost something?" he had asked her, coming up to her. And she had answered, "My cat." He didn't know why that answer had charmed him so. "Have you tied a stone around his neck?" he had asked. And she had looked up at him, quickly indignant, and then replied, gravely, looking straight at him, "No, he's a water cat." Now why had that made him laugh? Why did it still make him smile wistfully? She was an absurd girl. He had risen to the occasion as young men do when girls are pretty. He was glad to remember that. "Oh, that's the worst kind of cat! Don't you want me to help you fish for him?" And she had replied, "Have you got a net with you?" Whereupon he had forgotten his intention of calling for Mary Alliston. He had just stayed there jollying her. She amused him so gustily. He had thought she was a peach. He had lost sleep thinking about her. But now he had found her out. She was too independent. Too high and mighty. She would be like her aunt, thinking herself far superior to anyone else in town. Likely she would put on all the Fiske airs. On the whole, he liked that girl in Chicago better. If she read books of this sort, at least she didn't boast about it. She didn't fly into rages with him. Emily looked as if she might have pulled his hair. He must write to-morrow to the Chicago girl. Because he would be going back in a few more days and he really ought to write to her once in his vacation. That little Emily Fiske had made a fool of him. He had never really quarreled with a girl before. He hadn't really quarreled with her. She had quarreled with him. Funny how there for a while she had made him feel like a villain, like a regular old sinner! She flashed so, so thought-

lessly upon people, by some trick or other, that they couldn't see for the moment. He had never seen a girl who could make such unexpected attacks upon his admiration. She'd made a fool of him, all right. A kid like her! Well, he had learned something this vacation, these few days out here with his mother, he reflected, angrily. He had supposed the two weeks would be dull. And so they had been until he had happened along to fish for the water cat. She was a peach, though, to look at. He'd say that for her. But suppose he had gone on and married that tricky little hypocrite. Now how had she managed that trick with the nightdress? He had never felt so base, so absolutely polluted, before in his life.

Meanwhile Emily Fiske was lying face downward on her bed, crying with pain because the Jim she had loved so had been so horrid. He had been so horrid that she couldn't imagine anything horrider. He had taken her book away, because she couldn't defend it, because she couldn't help herself. She had felt like running after him and seizing it. What right had he! Oh, she had thought he was so sweet, so sweet and gentle. And he was so horrid that she sobbed aloud. It broke her heart to remember how coldly, how hatefully he had looked at her. She had thought he was such a darling. She had loved him so! And he had taken her book away. He had said it wasn't fit for her to read! She lay and sobbed bitterly. It never occurred to her that she had lied, that Jim might have at least some justification for his indignation. Between her anger—and she was very seldom angry—and her disappointment she was sorely hurt. She cried till she was weary. And then she rose vindictively, and wiped her face and powdered it, and started for the attic. And as she pushed the great top box inch by inch, she sobbed in spite of herself. She worked till she had pulled three books

out of the lower box. And then she wiped away her tears again, and inch by inch shut up her cave of treasures.

She went down to her room and inspected her haul. One was a disgusting Latin grammar. One was a history of a county of Massachusetts. The third was *Silas Marner*. She looked at its first pages and had to wipe her eyes before she could go on. It was a nice book, and they would want to take it away from her if they saw it. Well, she would show her aunt and that old Jim Kenworthy whether or not she would read what she wanted to. She would never speak to Jim again as long as she lived. Horrid thing, he was! And she sobbed and turned to the book.

The more she liked the tale, the more she hated Jim Kenworthy, and aunts in general. Another old aunt! That's all he would have been if she had—married him. Another aunt. She grew calm. She could even go down to supper without looking more than unusually unhappy. Her aunt would suppose she had been crying about that book, about Theron Ware. And so she moved through the early evening high-headedly, as nearly impertinent as she dared be.

But it grew dusk. Somewhere the young things would be gathering for the picnic. They wouldn't be missing her. The girls who were to be there were a year or two older than most of her friends. Those older girls acted as if Jim belonged to them. A most awful thought came to her. Would Jim go to that picnic with some one else? She was sitting on the porch alone with her aunt when that awful idea came to her, and she felt her lips quiver and her eyes fill, and she ran to her room. And what could she do there but throw herself down and cry bitterly, because she had thought he was so sweet, so adorable, and he wasn't really sweet at all! She wanted all his gentleness to comfort and console her and kiss her and claim her, and he

wasn't gentle! He was a nasty old rough domineering thing! She was crying because she was lonely. She wanted his hands to be longing for her. She wanted his fingers to be finding their way inside her cuffs, up her arms as far as they might reverently go. And he would be out there with those older girls, singing with the crowd, on the river bank, in the summer starlight. She hadn't even lighted the lamp in her room. It was hot enough as it was, and she lay and cried herself to sleep in the dark stuffiness, alone.

Jim had walked past the house twice while she wept, not because he wanted to see her, of course, but just because—some way he felt drawn down that street. And then he had got into his boat, and rowed up the river, and drifted back down, unrewarded. The house was dark. There was no sign of a girl on the bank looking for a river cat. He went back disconsolately to his mother's. She was sitting alone on her little porch. His brother had gone to the picnic. She wondered why Jim hadn't. But she was glad to have an hour with him. Really, she had seen so little of him since he had been at home. The time went so fast. He tried to answer her affectionately. After all, hadn't he come just to see her? He wondered why she bored him so. He said he wanted to go to bed early. And then he lay puzzling over what had happened to him, missing the girl. He couldn't understand it. What had that girl done to him? How had she hypnotized him when he stood, bound hand and foot, paralyzed by a sense of his masculine indecency, so that when her face was near his he couldn't for the life of him reach out and kiss her, or touch her, till she had kissed him. Why should he have had that peculiar sensation when, after all, he wasn't any worse than the next one. People liked him. Surely he was a decent enough sort of fellow. He wasn't half as bad as lots of men he

knew. And that girl had some way done he didn't know what. It was the funniest trick he ever saw a woman do. And he'd played around with a lot of them. None of them had ever got hold of him as she had, as she did at times. But how could a man marry a girl who lost her head like that, who exploded that way? And the brazenness of her! Lordy! He couldn't help smiling when he thought of the possibility that Emily's aunt might have come across that book. She would have died of the shock. And apparently the girl just left it lying round any place. He thanked his lucky stars they hadn't told his mother of their engagement. He had suggested it, but Emily had wanted it kept secret. He wondered if she had had any motive which he didn't know in insisting on that. Anyway, he could see now that she would have been like her aunt, thinking herself better than anyone else, putting on airs as Mrs. Alden always had, patronizing everybody. And then eventually she would inherit money; and you have to be pretty sure about a woman before you marry her rich, Jim Kenworthy reflected. He had never doubted Emily was an angel till this afternoon. He wished to heaven he hadn't seen her to-day. He cursed the heathen he had blessed so fervently for their intervention. He wanted that girl. She was a peach. He had never seen a girl he wanted so much.

He continued to want her so much that night, and the next day, and the next night, that desire quite overcame his vague distrust of her. He would have gone back to his angel, forgetful of her temper and pride. He couldn't resist her. He couldn't live without her. He would go back and apologize, and take all the blame, and get her in his arms again.

But before he got to her he met her on the street. He met her just in front of the court-house, under those dense hard

maple trees where the shade on the walk is solid at noontime. He had just begun to speak to her. He saw her coming, and she saw him. He felt himself begin to tremble, right there. He hadn't got her name out of his mouth till she was past him. Oh, how she had cut him! What an intolerable Fiske snubbing she had given him! He was unspeakably hurt. He was wounded as she had been wounded two days before. There was no use pleading, trying to plead with that girl! He was too sore to attempt it.

He went back to Chicago the next day, all a great, sore emptiness. Nature, abhorring a vacuum, provided, of course, a girl to rush into that one. The next spring Jim married Louise Bronson, a young woman of Chicago.

One morning soon after he left the town, Mrs. Alden had the boxes of books brought down to the upper hall. She sorted them into three lots. One she brought downstairs, where Emily might read them if she wished. One great pile of old textbooks she put back into a box loosely and unguardedly, feeling sure they were both uninteresting and harmless. And one lot she put into the largest box, and nailed down vindictively with many badly driven nails, wishing she might burn them all alive with a great fire. She intended protecting her brother's daughter from them with as great a care as she would have protected her from smallpox. They seemed more horrible to her than that disfiguring disease. If the girl wasn't happy, she was at least unscarred.

So thought Mrs. Alden; and the rest of her small world, if one of them had given the subject a thought, would have agreed with her. Emily did what she had always done. She sat sullenly at home, sullen except when she was reading, and she bloomed out into her natural gaiety in the society of her friends.

And if she cried herself to sleep often, no one knew of that. After all, what had happened to her? She had, to be sure, sustained a passionate assault on her imagination. But what is a mere girl's imagination? She had suffered the violation of her emotional remoteness. But everyone knows that emotions are not really things with substance. She was young, and young love is only a joke for adults. No sensible old person takes it seriously.

Emily herself scarcely took it seriously. She was lonelier with a greater, less vague loneliness than she had known before. She had a caressing nature, and those hours with Jim had satisfied not only the awakening of a normal girl, but all the years of an unnaturally starved child. Now she dreamed continually of a lover like Jim—of a man who would be what she had thought he was—of gentle hands and adoring eyes, and kisses that made her all deliciously weak and happy. Sometime she would find a man like that, and marry him. Of that she was sure. But she was quite unconscious of the way that determination ruled her immediate future. She wanted restlessly to get away from that town, where obviously there was no young man like what she had supposed Jim to be. She thought she wanted to go East to school. She had refused to go, the year before, because her aunt wouldn't listen to the outrageous proposal she had made. She had absolutely suggested going to one of those coeducational state universities, which were, Mrs. Alden granted, good enough in their way for the kind of people who go to them. The painful thing was that Emily should be so dead to the distinctions of life. She had said that if she couldn't go where her friends of the town went, she wouldn't go anywhere. And her aunt had thought at the time that probably a year at home, without anything to amuse her, would

bring her to her senses. And she had judged rightly. Emily had come to her senses. She had proposed going to a school where the right people go, the one her aunt had selected for her, where the girls of the other branches of the family had gone. Her distant cousin wrote occasionally of dances and parties and partners. And she was there, in a small women's college, looking for the man who was like what she had supposed Jim was, when she heard the next spring that he was married.

She cried a long time that night, she really didn't know why. It wasn't because she cared for him—that horrid old bossing thing who took books that didn't belong to him. She had looked eagerly over all the possible men, all the available partners, and there wasn't one of them whose hands, when they touched her, seemed to bring life, as Jim Kenworthy's did. Their contact, when it meant anything to her, seemed to bring death. She drew away from them in disgust. Their hands were not—right—some way. She couldn't understand her disappointment in them all. The other girls seemed pleased enough with them. She flirted—hunted about the more vigorously.

Chapter Two

It seemed to Emily quite the natural thing that her aunt, who had insisted on her going East to school when she wanted to go to school in the West, should insist on her coming home to the West when she wanted to stay on in the East. She had had two years of school terms and vacations, so happy, so gay, so much like those of a very fortunate, pretty, and normal young woman, that her aunt feared she would grow away from her Western home. Mrs. Alden herself had done that, in her youth. She had gone East, and married there as soon as she was "finished," and lived there until her early widowhood. She left her husband buried most honorably with his fathers—scarcely more dead, as far as she was concerned, than he had always been—and took the real treasures which marriage had brought her, the furniture he had inherited from his mother, back to her father's Illinois home. And then began for her something like an artistic passion, a consuming love for the home her father had hewn out of the frontier wilderness. There were women in town who affirmed that she had torn out the end of the new wing seven times before she got the windows arranged to her liking, perfectly spaced from all views outside, and sending sunlight into her closets. It was the fanlight attic window that caused the trouble. Undoubtedly Mrs. Alden, though she hated the very name of "new woman," was most advanced architecturally. Years later, when Emily in her placid maturity was enjoying the house which she had inherited from her aunt, she used often to puzzle over her, used often to sit and wonder what sort of woman she really had been, and she

never solved the question until she came upon a statement in a book to the effect that there are some people incapable of being deeply stirred by human relationships, whose emotions function only under the stimulus of material beauty. She recalled the really pitiful attempts her aunt had made to evince some adequate admiration for Emily's little daughter—that perfect heavenly baby whom Emily could see that no normal human man or woman could resist smiling upon. Her aunt had made a labored grimace at the child, and Emily, watching it, somewhat resentfully remembered the expression of a spontaneous admiration that came over that old face when it contemplated a really good chair. When she was spending her inheritance comfortably, she used to try to do the old lady justice.

Her aunt had been a just and well-disposed woman. There was even a sort of kindness about her, a well-polished, well-preserved mahogany kindness; and a gentleness, of a good design, conventional and chaste. Emily was in these later years a little bit ashamed of her suspicion that her aunt liked living in the town merely because she was a social bully who enjoyed cracking over the heads of her friends the prestige which she had enjoyed as daughter of a most honorable Governor of the state. For undoubtedly Mrs. Alden had an exalted purpose in her conscientious life. It was gentlemen of family, of ability and wealth like her father, who had made the state what it was, and had shown smaller folk how to live in it. And it was his daughter's duty to maintain that standard of righteousness and good taste among—er—those Westerners, and people of that sort. If her niece Emily should marry and settle down in the East, this home of the Governor, the very trees he had planted and preserved of this primeval forest, might fall into the hands, eventually, of—anybody. Emily was recalled.

She came home not unwillingly, on the whole. A girl with a wardrobe like hers must necessarily have had some interest in its effect upon her friends. She had to some extent forgotten the atmosphere of her home, the resentment and rage with which she had endured her aunt. She was determined, now that she was older, to live on better terms with her. She even imagined herself getting along easily with her. By the end of her first day she had received one of the great impressions of her homecoming.

She was surprised by the distinction of the house. Her grandfather had chosen a good site on the river bank in the wilderness, not because he was thinking only of the house that he would afterward build there, but because what produce he got from his lands he floated down the river on rafts, to the larger river, which took it to the Mississippi, which carried it to the most accessible market in New Orleans. He had built there the little light-yellow stone house which was now the hall between the two wings, and which had had no thoroughfare near it then but the cow path to the ford. When Emily's father added the first stone wing he built a white picket fence along the grassy road and in front of it a board sidewalk, and later planted the gaudy hedges. Her aunt after his death added the second wing, of yellow brick, deploring the impossibility of getting stone; and she had put down the cement walk, the first in town. Years after Emily returned from school in the East, a national highway flowed hootingly by, carrying New-Yorkers to California, Californians to New York, dozens by the hour, parallel approximately to Governor Fiske's youthful cow path, and two good blocks away from the lucky old Fiske place, which stood in an undisturbed, because badly paved, quietness.

There was an excitement about unpacking, these first hours

after she arrived, about greeting all the friends, that made the first day happy. But by the noon of the second day all her good resolves had vanished. She was sulking defensively away from her aunt. She realized vividly that she could never live in a house with that woman. She wished she hadn't come back. She wished she had run away, that she had gone to work, as more adventurous spirits were talking of doing, at anything, in any place.

She put on one of those smart white frocks she had brought from New York, that afternoon, she took a rosy pink parasol which she knew very well would bring faces to the windows as she passed down the street, and she went to see a friend who had been unable to come to see her.

She found her in bed. This temporary invalid was the girl who had lent Emily *The Damnation of Theron Ware.* After the two had kissed each other, and hugged, and exchanged the customary young ejaculations, presently Madge, leaning against her pillows, said:

"Emily, shut that door. I want to show you something." And as Emily obeyed, she continued: "Open that top drawer and give me that blue box. You see it?"

She reached out eagerly and took the box, and opened it, and took out a tiny black box. Emily knew then what was coming. Madge opened it, and looked at it herself a moment shyly, and handed it to her. "You see that?" she asked.

"Oh, *Madge!*" Emily exclaimed.

Then Madge tried to tell her love story.

Emily didn't know what was happening to her. Some great pain, a physical soreness, had seemed to come over her when Madge suddenly kissed that ring. She felt physically ill.

The overflowing of Madge's happiness was sickening. Her

sense of loneliness, her vital need of something, was almost more than she could bear. And when Madge presently finished her bursts of ecstatic confidence and she began questioning her, Emily's confusion seemed to belie the simplicity of her answers.

"Now you tell me, Emily! Who's your man? And when's it coming off?"

"Oh, I—I haven't anybody!"

"Oh, come on and tell me! I've told you!"

"Honestly! Cross my heart and hope to die! I'm not engaged!"

"Well, I'm not exactly *engaged,* either."

"But I mean—I haven't got anything to tell you."

"Honestly? I don't believe you!"

"Honestly, Madge. I don't know. Someway I never seem to like any of them. They—sort of make me sick, some way."

"Oh, well, then you haven't met him. You won't feel that way when you see the right one!"

"Won't I?"

"Oh, Emily, I should say not! Why, when I think of Peter I just—feel happy all over!"

"Do you?" asked Emily, wistfully, as if she had never known the feeling.

And that night, for the first time in many months, she cried herself to sleep. She didn't know why, except that she was lonely. She only knew she wasn't crying about Jim Kenworthy, because he was a married man, with a baby, and certainly a girl like Emily Fiske wasn't crying about any horrid old married man with a baby—whom she didn't like, anyway. But some way, in the world there seemed such a dearth of men who were like what she had supposed he was—before she really knew him. And she didn't like her aunt, and she didn't want

to live with her, and there weren't any men in the town she liked, anyway.

The next afternoon, when that mood was gone, as she walked bareheaded along the shady street with her rosy parasol, she saw a young man coming toward her—and he was like Jim Kenworthy. Had she not often resolved to be perfectly indifferent to that discarded lover if ever she saw him again? And now, at the sight of his mere young brother, she felt her heart all at once pounding confusedly within her. Bob had been looking at her as he approached, not recognizing her at first, interested by the sight of an unidentified young girl quite at home on that neighborly street. If he didn't recognize her, she wouldn't speak to him; anyway, he wasn't really like Jim—not nearly as good-looking.

"Well, Emily Fiske!" he cried. "I didn't know you were home!"

He was carrying a bicycle wheel, and the hand he freed from it was dusty, and he had on a dark, untidy shirt.

"I got back day before yesterday," she murmured.

He stood shaking her hand.

"You've changed so I didn't hardly know you."

"I saw you didn't."

"You've changed so! By *golly!* you've grown pretty!"

Her inexplicable confusion increased, increasing her rosy prettiness.

"That's nice, isn't it?" she managed to say, demurely. "I mean, it's nice of you to say so."

"No trouble to me," said Bob, still looking directly, bluntly, at her.

She wasn't accustomed to that sort of directness, of admiration so crystally sincere. She didn't then know how to trifle

with it, as she had done with the lighter chivalry of lighter young males. She didn't know how to appear unconscious of it that afternoon. She didn't discover how to all the summer.

For Bob Kenworthy managed to be where she was whenever it was possible, and though his lips never said again, "By golly! you've grown pretty, Emily!" they didn't really need to, so well his dumb eyes expressed his thought. Bob wasn't facile, as Jim had been, with phrases a girl liked to remember when he was gone. He didn't dance as nimbly as Jim had danced. He was heavier than his brother, and darker, and without his grace. He wasn't unusually popular, as Jim had been in the town. Men of weight in the community weren't prophesying a career for Bob, as they did for Jim. Bob had begun practicing law with an old wise lawyer in town, who regretted, for Mrs. Kenworthy's sake, the fact that his potential partner spent most of his time trying to propel a bicycle by electricity. But still, after all—Bob *was* like Jim.

Emily thought about that fact a great deal. He *was* like Jim, and in some ways he was like what she had supposed Jim to be. He thought she was "all right." He thought she was perfect. She knew that. Bob's silences told her many interesting things. And as the summer went on he grew more silent. He also grew more skilful in making occasions when they were alone, when he might have said much.

It happened toward the end of September that Madge and her lover came drifting down the river at dusk a Sunday afternoon, and Emily hailed them from the back yard, conscious that her aunt might scold her for having been alone so much with Bob. Since it suited Peter's and Madge's purpose just then to seem to have some interest in other humans, they came in, and the four of them, playing about, started a little bonfire of fallen

leaves on the gravel, under the willow that hung out over the water just there. And then Emily had gone carefully into the house and brought out some potatoes to bake, and some cakes and fruit. They had their supper, and it grew dark. Peter and Madge took themselves on their solitary way, after their heroic concession to the conventions. It was time for Emily to go indoors. It was cool, and she had on a thin white beruffled dress, so that she drew her scarlet golf cape closely about her. It was the time of year that a man needs a cave and a mate and a fire. Bob was standing near her. He seemed to have to stamp away at the smoldering fire a long time with his foot, working at it slowly—making it safe. And then, when there was not a smoldering ember left to make even a little light, something gave way in him, and he cried,

"My God, I can't stand this!" And he took her in his arms and began kissing her.

So their troubles began.

"You've got to marry me, Emily," he said. "I haven't anything. I haven't anything to offer you. But I got to have you."

No one had ever before said "My God!" to Emily Fiske in her life. It was a new and terrible occasion to her. The word seemed—not offensive—for some reason—almost appropriate. She was in the presence of a frightful reality. Bob's love for her was a thing so real it was almost tangible. One could reach out and feel the solidity of his passion, surely. She was glad he kissed her. She was relieved that his silence was over. There was a depth to this blunt Bob that was satisfying—very satisfying. She didn't care if he wasn't brilliant. She didn't care if he wasn't so handsome as Jim. She knew he was magnificently true.

The next evening she said to him: "It was awful, Bob.

I'm glad you weren't there. She wouldn't listen to me. She wouldn't hear of it. I told you she'd never like it. She says I'm to send you home now. You can't come here to call, even, she says. She don't want me to have anything more to do with you. But I don't care. I meant what I said last night. I'm of age."

"Let me go and talk to her. I ought to have gone with you. Let me——"

"No, Bob, I won't. I won't have her scolding you. You don't know her. We'll just have to wait."

"What good'll waiting do, Emily! Let's go and get married. She'll be all right when she has to."

"Where'll we go? How?"

"We can go to Chicago."

"Oh no! I can't do that, Bob. We aren't ready yet."

"I'm ready."

"I know, but we've got to wait a while. We can't just go and get married this way."

"Why not?"

"Oh, Bob, not so soon! We must wait awhile. I can't run away. I can't elope and be married in Chicago."

"Well, we can be married at mother's if you'd like that better. It don't matter to me where it's done. Come on, Emily. Let's go down and tell her. She'll tell us what to do."

"Haven't you told her?"

"You asked me not to."

"Yes, I know. But wouldn't you rather tell her alone, Bob?"

"No, I don't care. I'd rather tell her with you. Come on, Emily. She's at home now. Let's ask her. I—Emily—I don't know how I could ask you. I knew your aunt would be hot about it. It isn't as if I had a lot of money."

"We won't need much money, Bob. I told her that, and she just kind of laughed at me."

"She did, did she? Well, anyway, mother won't laugh at it."

"I don't know her very well, Bob." They had left the house and were walking together toward Mrs. Kenworthy's when this shy remark made Bob squeeze the hand that was on his arm.

"Don't you worry. Mother'll help us, all right. Emily, I couldn't sleep last night, I couldn't work to-day, for thinking of you. We'll get a little house some place. Johnson's house is rented. I found that out. To some Swede family."

Mrs. Kenworthy, that excellent woman, happened to be returning from her next-door neighbor's, a little old gray shawl around her shoulders, when she met her son walking with Mrs. Alden's niece. She had realized that he was being attentive to that pretty girl, but she had no misgivings till they turned with her up the walk to go into the house with her. Her house had no gracious approach, like Mrs. Alden's. The little story-and-a-half thing—the spiritual shrine of the town, the hidden confessional of the neighborhood—sat meekly a dozen steps back from the unimportant street it graced, so that the three of them had reached the door before she had time to give a thought, almost, to the significance of this somewhat unusual visit.

Bob said: "Let's not go in. Let's sit here on the porch."

"Oh, it's too cold! I can't sit down here."

"Sit down just a minute, mother." He had gone to the door and pulled out of it the nearest chair. The willow rocker Mrs. Kenworthy sat in during the summer months had not yet been put away. Bob made Emily sit down. He stood by her chair. There was a moment of silence.

"What's the trouble, Robert?" His mother seemed uneasy.

"We're going to get married, mamma. And Mrs. Alden

won't let Emily. I want to go to Chicago and get it done, and she don't want to. I told her you'd let us be married here, if she wants to. You will let us, won't you, mamma!"

"Why—why, Robert! You surprise me!" Mrs. Kenworthy had been ill a great deal. Her voice seemed feeble now.

"I know it, mamma, but Mrs. Alden scolds Emily. She won't let us be married there. I told Emily—"

Emily couldn't see plainly the figure in the darkness. She wondered vaguely if Bob's mother wasn't shrinking away from her. Bob went on with his argument:

"You let us be married here. Or else you go and see her. I bet you could fix it up with her, mamma. She'd agree, if you asked her. She wouldn't be so hard on Emily. If you——"

"Robert, wait a minute, dear! I didn't know—I didn't even know you were engaged—"

"We weren't, mother. We only—decided last night. And Mrs. Alden told Emily—"

Bob's mother had risen and was coming toward Emily. She got up, and felt a hand on her arm and a face near hers. She was being kissed tremulously.

"I'm very glad—" Bob's mother was saying.

"I know you didn't expect it. I'm sure it's a shock to you. I hope you won't be angry—"

"Oh, my dear child, I'm not angry. But I'm surprised. You took my breath away."

"You tell us what to do, mother."

"My dear Robert, let me think. I can't say offhand what you're to do. There's no hurry. We must think it over well. You mustn't do anything rash."

"Mamma, we are in a hurry. We want to be married right away."

"I can say I won't approve of any hurried course. You can't be married right away. You're not earning enough to support a wife—"

"I told her that, mamma. I told her I hadn't any money. If she's willing—"

"I don't mind about money, Mrs. Kenworthy. I could be very economical—"

"Oh, my dear children!" Anyway, Bob's mother hadn't laughed at that. She seemed to pity them. She had spoken with a rush of emotion—sympathy or something gentle. They both were comforted.

"I *told* Emily you'd know what to do. We want to be married here right away, mother—"

"I—I'm not going to say—anything yet. But you can't be married—I don't think I'll let you be married here while Mrs. Alden is opposed. I must talk it over with her, Robert. We've been neighbors—we've been friends for years, and I wouldn't like any—trouble to arise over this. I'll go and talk to her—"

"Oh, I'm afraid she—" Emily spoke impulsively.

"What are you afraid of?" One could say what one felt when Bob's mother spoke in that tone.

"I'm afraid she won't be nice to you. I'm afraid she's too—she's mad about it, Mrs. Kenworthy. She won't be polite."

"You are young, of course, Emily."

"I'm twenty-one."

"And Bob hasn't a practice yet, you know. But I think if you are—thoughtful—if you are reasonable, I mean, Robert, that she'll give her consent, when Robert is—really established here."

"I tell you right now we aren't going to wait till I've made my fortune, mother."

"I know, Robert, but marriage is a serious matter."

"Well, I'm serious enough, ain't I? I'm in earnest, mamma."

Mrs. Kenworthy gave a sigh. There was a silence.

"It's too cold for me to sit here," she began again. "And I must have time to think this over. Let's go inside. Come in."

They went in. Mrs. Kenworthy's sitting room was a widowed room with two sons, like its mistress. The walnut bookcase and the secretary the young bride and groom had brought together when Jim's father had been called to the Congregational church in the new town. The Sistine Madonna had been a surprise to young Mrs. Kenworthy from her husband, a gift for her to look at while she waited for her first-born. Those three books on the lower shelf he had bought the week before he was killed—when Bob was a baby. That big comfortable new rocker Jim had bought for her when he was in college, and those shining new electric lights—there were few of them in the town yet—Jim and Bob had had put into the house for a present to their mother because her eyes were so poor, so that she might read at least sometimes of an evening. And that sewing machine was an old one which Bob had made sew by electricity. Mrs. Kenworthy didn't sew much herself, but when the Aid Society met there she did enjoy the comments on her son's cleverness. She invited all her neighbors to use the filial rarity, modestly, but maternally. The clock on the mantel the Bible class had presented to her after she had taught it for twenty years. The rather good velvet Brussels carpet on it had been willed by a member of the church to Mrs. Kenworthy. In no other way would she have possessed so expensive a covering for her floor. The room was meager; it was immaculate; it was

sunny; and it had house plants already in for the winter—the cactus which was to bloom at Christmas, and begonias with great leaves, and ivy geraniums. And Bob turned on a perfect glare of white electric light, proudly.

They sat down, Emily in the gift chair. Mrs. Kenworthy kept the shawl drawn around her shoulders. Even so, Emily was conscious of the fact that her sleeves were of an unfashionable fullness and cut. She wanted to look intently at Bob's mother's face, and Bob's mother seemed to look at her with a new interest. If Mrs. Kenworthy was a woman strangely canonized by a neighborhood during her lifetime, she wasn't beautiful to look at—not exactly. She was large and rather gaunt, with a long face and big, near-sighted, peering blue eyes, and very light hair, quite gray, and thick light eyebrows. But even as a prematurely old and wrinkled woman she was interesting to look at, if only for the stories people told of her. She was quiet. She was shy. She was almost mysteriously saintly. Emily kept glancing at her. Their eyes met longingly as Bob pleaded his case like a slow young lawyer.

"I think I'll go to bed," she said at length. "I—don't know what to say to you, Robert. I feel—tired. I don't feel—very well. I want to think this over. You'll excuse me, Emily. You stay here—"

"Mrs. Alden says she won't have me coming there, mamma. Emily can come here. We can always come here, can't we?"

"Of course. I shall be glad to have you, Emily." She had risen. She spoke with an effort. "I must get to know you, now. Couldn't you come over to-morrow morning, and we could have a talk?"

"Oh yes! I'd love to come."

"Well, you come, then. And I'll leave you now. You see

to the fire, son." She kissed Bob. And then she came and kissed Emily, very kindly, very gently, and went up the stairs—an unsubstantial woman—scarcely more than a cloud—or a shadow.

"Oh, Bob, isn't she lovely!" Emily exclaimed, when the door at the bottom of the stair had closed.

"She's all right," Bob agreed, without enthusiasm. "Come on, Emily, I better fix the fire while I think of it. I'll show you the kitchen!"

"I'd like a nice little kitchen like this, Bob! Hasn't she got everything—all arranged so neatly. It's just ducky. She'd show me how to do things, wouldn't she?"

"You bet!" answered the lover. They sat down on the edge of the kitchen table together. The cook stove took the chill from the pleasant little workshop, and because they were lovers they lingered there, talking, till the girl had to dream that night of little homey kitchens, and of wonderful great cakes coming frosted and fragrant from the oven.

Chapter Three

She gathered asters—small red and blue asters—and went eagerly to offer them to Bob's mother, the next forenoon, the romance of the little cozy kitchen still charming her. But by daylight, with her lover not there, she was constrained and uncomfortable with his mother at first, and wondered why she had come expecting something. To be sure, there was a warmth about Mrs. Kenworthy's greeting, a whole-heartedness like Bob's—or like Jim's, even, that was—just—lovely some way.

"I'm afraid I didn't seem very happy over the news last night, Emily, but I was so surprised! It was a bolt from the blue. I had no idea of your—feelings for one another. I didn't expect it, some way. Robert has never been—fond of girls. He's different from Jimmy, that way. I was very much upset just at first. And I thought about the matter a long time. I went over the whole thing seriously. And I think I ought to warn you—I'm older than you—that it's a very serious matter for a girl, brought up as you've been, to marry a poor man."

"Yes, I suppose it is." Emily thought that was the proper answer.

Then there was silence. Emily, looking around the room, saw a picture of Jim on the mantel, and near it a picture of a baby. That would be Jim's baby. But Jim and his embraces were far away then, and Bob was near and ardent. She didn't know what to say, so she murmured,

"I could be very economical."

This seemed not to reach Mrs. Kenworthy, who sat thought-

fully watching the woman whom her boy had chosen to marry. For she went on presently, considering her words carefully:

"And it would also be a very serious thing—I must say this to you—not to marry a poor man, under some circumstances—if you both loved each other."

"I'm *sure* of *that!*" Emily spoke with conviction.

"I had to think over my own life." There was a pause. It seemed difficult for the older woman to say all she meant. "I felt—you will not mind my saying this, Emily—I felt old and lonely. I remembered the times I had had to consider the possibility of—when I was so sick—of not living. Of dying and leaving the little boys alone. And I always prayed I might live as long as they needed me. And now, if Bob is to be married—if he is to have you—it seemed as if—my life was over—in a way."

"Oh *no!*" cried Emily.

"I felt as if I could see it as a whole." She paused, as if she was screwing up courage to say something very difficult. "I remembered that I was younger than you when I married my husband, and he was younger than Robert is. We hadn't much to live on. We didn't seem to need much. You know how poor we've been. We were so young, and foolish! I remember when he would speak of insurance—of saving something for the future—I would laugh. It didn't seem possible—he could be taken away from me. I say to myself now, to justify myself, that if I had had any health, any strength, I could have supported the children better. Many women do. But sometimes, when I have been ill"—she shuddered—"I have had to *take* things—charity, you understand—from people, because there wasn't anything for the boys to eat. That was long ago," she added, and went on. "I tell you this because I think you ought

to consider it. I had to *take* things, accept—things—charity. Oh, I know it was willingly given—by friends—kindly given, of course. But it was charity. And yet I was thinking, Emily —that if I had it all to do over again, if I were a girl, and he should come again and ask me—if I knew all that I would have to go through, I would—do it all over again."

"You were happy!" The cry came involuntarily from the girl, stirred by this shy, intense confession.

"Yes, we were happy. We lived together six years." Emily sat bound by the spell of this gentle passion.

"And then I've had the boys. People have pitied me, but I've had the boys. I realized that all the time. There was a friend who lived with me once—Miss McCann, who taught school here. She used to pity me. She never married, herself. And she used to pity me. 'You're a proud woman!' she would say to me, when I told her I thought I had more reason to pity her than she had to pity me. 'You're a proud woman,' she would say, 'and you don't want anybody to know how hard pressed you are!' She couldn't understand, Emily. She never knew what she missed, poor thing. She inherited quite a lot of money later, and she used to send me things because she felt sorry for us. Emily, I dare say—if you marry Robert, people may pity you—some day. It may be."

Emily laughed a little, nervously, to hide her emotion.

"Oh, I shouldn't care a bit if they did! That wouldn't make any difference to me!"

"My dear child, you don't know what it means. I hope you'll never know. But even so, if I could be sure you and Robert would be as happy together as we were—for six years—I would say 'marry.' "

"Oh, I'm so glad!"

"I talked to Robert this morning. We sat at breakfast so long that I haven't my dishes washed yet. At first I urged him to wait. I had made up my mind I would insist on that. It seemed fairer to you. But when I saw how he felt about it, I said—I would agree to whatever date your aunt sets. I couldn't help thinking—Emily, the boy is very much in earnest about you. He's very much in love with you. I hadn't expected this of Robert, some way. He doesn't care about girls, much. He never has. He's like his father in that. Robert may not have a large income now. He hasn't, in fact. But he has something that is—very valuable—in a husband, Emily. I hardly know how to express it. I've been thinking it over, and I believe if you marry him you will never need for a second to doubt him. He'll never look at another woman. His father was like that. The women of his church were—very fond of him, always. They hung about him. It annoyed him—it was the cross of his profession. I could laugh about them all with him. We used to joke about them—quite respectfully, of course. But I never had to—doubt, for a minute, or be—unhappy about them. And Robert has that kind of—whole-heartedness, I think. He has—given himself over to you, Emily—for good. Oh, I wish I knew you better!"

"We'll get to know each other now!"

"You look like a generous woman! You're so young yet! I wouldn't like him to marry a woman who has nothing to give him! I don't mean money, you know. I mean—a—a—woman—a scheming, grudging, a thin sort of woman, with—no tenderness to give him—no—no generosity about her. Because Robert will never measure his gifts—his love. I wish I—I could tell what you are like!"

"I don't know. I don't know myself—"

"I remember your mother. I thought of her last night. I—"

"Oh, did you!" Emily murmured.

"I remember the morning she came over to tell me that she was going to have a baby. That was you, of course. I was in bed. It was after Robert was born." She talked a long time about those days. "I never thought we might—be—united this way," she said at length. "You don't look like her. She was so small. But I'd like to think you are like her. If I give you Robert—"

The reminiscence stopped suddenly. Mrs. Kenworthy was sitting tensely upright in her rocker in the bay window, so that the brilliant cold sunshine fell over her shoulders. Her voice had been calm enough, and controlled, but the ceasing of it seemed to vibrate tragically, intolerably. Emily had been feeling her words penetrate unimagined possibilities. She had realized her own infancy—she had seen, at his mother's description, little red-faced Bob wrapped in a blanket, she had heard motherhood renouncing itself in those words, "If I give Robert to you."

"Oh, you're not *giving* him to me!" she cried.

Mrs. Kenworthy answered her almost sternly.

"Yes, I am. You must understand that. I am *giving* him to *you*. If you marry him, his life depends on you. And I don't know you! I want you to be worthy of him. I know it's foolish of me to say that. I've never been worthy of them myself. I often wonder what I've done to deserve two such good sons. But I want *you* to be worthy of him. They're good boys, Emily. They've been perfect sons as far as—it was within the possibilities, as far as they *could* be. If they have disappointed me, it was my fault. I wanted them to be their father over again. I wanted them to enter the ministry. But they couldn't. They—hadn't the inclination. It wasn't possible for them. I had to

learn that they weren't their father. They weren't *his* mother's sons. They were only *my* sons. We wrong others when we expect too much from them. They do as well as they can, don't they? Robert does. But he needs patience. He needs a wife who will be satisfied with him. Who will make much of him. Who won't reproach him for not being like Jimmy—not brilliant like his brother. Girls—I don't remember what they think—what they expect love to be. But it's only patience—and waiting. That's what it is. It's patience that you enjoy. That's all it is for women. Are you patient?"

"Oh no! I don't know. I don't think so!"

"But you're so young. Some way, I didn't feel young when I was married. But I must have been. You'll learn. You'll understand. I tried to think of it from *your* point of view. I tried to think of what *you* would need. Of your happiness. I thought of your mother. But some way it was Robert I really thought of. Men aren't anything, Emily." She stopped, unable to explain. "It's hard to explain to you"—she had paused—"I don't know what you expect—I don't know how to tell—you. But *men aren't* anything—a young man like Robert—not anything yet. He's just a possibility. A mother just has to think what his wife might make of him—how she might—make his life—and the wife has to think of what she can do for herself—that's only natural. If you love him enough, marry him if he is poor—if he's always to be poor. You won't be building on a great foundation, but you'll be building on a sure one. On solid rock. I told him this morning I would agree to whatever date your aunt would set."

"But she'll never agree. I know she will never be—willing."

"She has to think it over. You don't realize what a—surprise

it probably was to her. Robert nearly took my breath away last night. I didn't know what to say, for a minute."

"It'll take her a long time."

An affectionate smile spread over Mrs. Kenworthy's face at the sight of Emily's dejection.

"Well, my dear, if you're to be married, you'll probably be married a long time. We'll hope so."

"Don't you go, will you, till—till I tell you she's—thought it over. Honestly, I don't think you'd better go right away!"

"Very well, I won't. You can come to see me as often as you like. It's not going to hurt Robert to have to be patient a little while. Let your aunt have plenty of time. Just let her think about it."

"Oh, she'll think about it, all right. She won't think about anything else!"

"I dare say not! I shan't, myself. And probably both of you won't."

"Oh, that's different! We're the ones concerned—you might say."

"And I might say that Mrs. Alden and I have been concerned in this matter a great deal longer than you have."

"I suppose that *is* true." Emily could readily allow Mrs. Kenworthy's interest when that kindly face smiled on her. She grudged ascribing to her aunt any deep concern in her affairs. But she couldn't complain of her to Mrs. Kenworthy. She wouldn't for the world have had Bob's mother know of her constant unworthy strife with her aunt, of her sullenness, of her aunt's unfairness. It seemed so low, as she sat there. Mrs. Kenworthy got along well with her aunt. She almost seemed to like her. But then, of course, she didn't live in the same house with her! And so she would never be able to

understand the conditions there. The girl was emotionally and mentally aroused. She was stirred to a great longing to live, to know what life was all about, to understand what this woman knew. The whole Kenworthy family seemed to—draw her heart out, some way. She couldn't experience them superficially. They were fated to go to the depth of her, to open up new ways of life through her heart and soul also. She had never before wanted to marry Bob—or even Jim—as much as she wanted to when she came hushed and sober away from that visit with their mother.

So they waited, day by day, for Mrs. Alden to show signs of relenting. Bob would whistle as he went by the Alden house, and Emily would go out to meet him for a walk. Or they would meet at the home of her friend so happily engaged and so considerate of their needs. Or at Bob's mother's. It was no trouble for them to arrange day by day for their hours together. And almost every day Emily came back to talk with Bob's mother, to listen to her, drawn as all young things are to those who speak honestly of what they suppose life to be. Strange how reality seemed to dwell in that house! Ecstasy and joy seemed members of the household, and love and peace lived there familiarly. Romance seemed just to have run upstairs for a minute, leaving her workbag on her chair. While at Mrs. Alden's one met only politeness and respectability—stiff and self-conscious personalities.

Mrs. Kenworthy seemed to take it for granted that this girl was to be her son's wife, sometime soon. She opened her rather reserved heart to her. Emily, of course, had not come to that inevitable stage when she could observe flippantly that widows as a rule esteem marriage much more highly than wives, and that they esteem it more highly as the years of their widowhood

pass. The things that Mrs. Kenworthy seemed to know gave a reality to life. Mrs. Kenworthy spoke about Bob's infancy. Just imagine a great, strong man like Bob being a baby. His mother had hoped he would be a girl. Well, suppose he had been a girl? Then whom would Emily Fiske have married? Mrs. Kenworthy believed terribly hard in love. She made Emily curious about things. She wondered all day, all the night she was awake, what it would be like to be Bob's wife? Would she always love him? Would he always love her? Would they be happy? What was the future to be like? Mrs. Kenworthy's words were at times like little knot-holes in the great blank wall of the future, through which for a minute she might look, to catch a glimpse of what was to come. Mrs. Kenworthy made her think—drew her toward—well, whatever that was—the future, or life, or whatever you call it.

One afternoon she had been talking about "Jimmy and Robert" and their father. She talked of "Jimmy" always with gratitude and admiration. It happened once that, rearranging the treasures of her memory, she chose to hold up for the girl's inspection one of her dearest.

"He always tried to take care of me—from the day his father died, Emily. I remember—these are terrible things to tell you, but they won't hurt you—I remember the morning after the funeral. I'll never forget that. I had borne up—I had got through that day. I even forget hours of it. But the next morning—I hadn't slept much—I got up and came down to the kitchen. He always got up and built the fire in the cook stove. And I came down to the kitchen, and he hadn't been there. The stove was cold. And I had—such an awful experience. I know now it was a temptation from Satan. I just suddenly knew, when I saw that stove, that I couldn't live. It was as if a voice

spoke to me. I thought I heard some one say, 'Death would be better than this loneliness.' And—Emily—the butcher knife had been left lying on the table. I took it in my hand and stood there, holding it. I knew I was going to die. I was glad. I forgot everything. I sat down in a chair, at the table, there—to—to do it. I sat there. I was out of my mind. You don't ever need to tell me that it's wrong to kill yourself. People don't know what they're doing. I know all about that. I sat there, and then—Jimmy came down, lugging Robert. I had forgotten my boys, Emily! I hadn't heard my own baby crying. He had yelled himself almost weak. When I looked at the clock I saw I had been sitting there an hour. Jimmy came down, half dressed, and his hair standing up, not combed. I can see his little face now. And he said to me, "I help you get breakfast, mamma!" He didn't talk altogether clearly even at five. He said he had called me to come to get Robert. And I hadn't heard anything, Emily. And when I saw that little boy, it all went away like a nightmare. I came to. I cried and cried and got them something to eat. I heard afterward that a neighbor—a Mrs. Fowler—they built the house the Kentons live in now; you must have heard of them. She was a very good neighbor. She had kept the children the day of the funeral, and she had told poor little Jimmy he must help me, because his father wasn't there to take care of me. She certainly impressed it on his mind—too much. I think he has carried the burden of Robert and me ever since. He was like a father to Robert, always. I used to call him my right-hand man. People say James is a natural-born money-maker. And when I hear that I remember how he had to earn money when he was almost a baby. No wonder he got the habit! But I was always sorry—he

had so much responsibility. I was glad Robert never had that sense of it so prematurely."

Wonderful what a good boy Mrs. Kenworthy thought that Jim of hers was! But why did she pity him? Emily began to wonder, hearing her talk, if she wasn't anxious about Robert's marriage because she was worried about Jim's. Not that she ever said as much. But she refrained too carefully from passing any judgment on her Chicago daughter-in-law. Emily fancied she could hear an undertone of pain when she chanced to mention Jimmy's home. However, why should she, Emily Fiske, be interested in Jim Kenworthy's affairs? Naturally, he wouldn't be happy. No woman would let him boss her around that way. Emily listened only because she wanted to hear Mrs. Kenworthy talk about Robert, and love, and life in general.

One evening Bob said to her eagerly, as soon as he had a chance—he had just tucked the robe around her feet, and they had started for a buggy ride toward the most unfrequented road:

"It's all right, Emily. That's settled. Were you at home when mother came to-day? Gee! I wonder what your aunt said to her!"

"When? Did your mother talk to auntie to-day? I didn't know she had. Auntie never said a word to me about it!"

"Where were you?"

"I drove out with Marjorie after wild grapes. I told you we were going."

"Oh yes, you did. Mother didn't tell me she was going. Gee! I'd like to know what happened! Mother was mad! I never saw her so mad in my life! She snapped!"

"Oh, Bob, what did she say? I wish auntie hadn't—"

"She didn't *say* anything, of course. But she looked daggers.

She said we could be married whenever we wanted to, as far as she was concerned. At home, if we wanted to. And she said if I wasn't a good husband to you—she'd spank me, Emily. She didn't exactly say that, but that's what she seemed to mean!" Bob laughed.

"Oh, Bob! I'll bet auntie was just horrid to her! I'm afraid auntie hurt her feelings!"

"It had to come, Emily. We can't wait on your aunt forever. Let's go to Chicago, Emily. Will you go to-morrow?" Bob drew her close against him.

"Will you, Emily?"

"What for?" she whispered at length.

"To get married, of course!"

"Oh, Bob!" she whispered. She seemed to be shrinking away from something, but closer against him.

"Will you, Emily!"

"Oh, Bob!" He seemed to want it so. And things at home were getting more nearly intolerable.

"The little Trenton house would do. We'd paint and paper it all up. I'd do that myself. We could stay with mother a week or two till we got it ready. We could stay with her a year, if we needed to. She likes you, Emily. It wouldn't be a very grand place. But it's big enough for just the two of us. And then we'd have a place of our own. A home, Emily. Think of that. And when old Bosworth gets back, things are sure to pick up for the firm. I'll work hard. I'll earn enough for—my wife. You'd be my nice little wife, Emily." The old words were commonplace enough. The longing of his tone, and the tenderness of his lips, and the warmth of his nearness were ecstatically convincing.

"Oh, *Bob!*"

Chapter Four

When they came back from Chicago, Mrs. Kenworthy had supper all ready for them, with the best tablecloth on the table, and Robert's room adorned as bridally as possible. She let them get their baggage up into the room, and wash and come down, and they were sitting down to the table before she began the really important question.

"And how was Jimmy?"

Bob seemed to drop into his chair. He looked utterly blank —at his mother first, and then with returning intelligence to his wife.

"Well, that's one on me, mamma!" he said, as if he couldn't believe his words. "I never thought of Jim! I forgot to look him up!"

Emily saw the implication.

"We *did* speak of it, Bob. We *meant* to call him up, you remember."

"Yes, we *did* mean to, mamma. I'm sorry we forgot. But then he's all right. We know that. It isn't as if there was anything the matter with him."

Mrs. Kenworthy didn't seem offended by Bob's negligence. Not at all. She seemed pleased about something. All the large features of her thin old face beamed with amusement, so that she grew red up to the light-yellow hair gone gray on her forehead.

"We were only there six days, mamma!"

"It's a good sign," she chuckled. And her little laugh filled Emily to overflowing with that delightful sense of being

approved of. She loved being there, in that house, feeling at last almost as if she was really at home, a member of the family, an accepted, grown-up wife. Bob beamed upon her, and his mother beamed on them both, and the deep inner satisfaction of the younger two broke forth into nonsense. Mrs. Kenworthy wasn't going to let Emily help wash the dishes—not with that dress on! Bob seized his mother from behind and held her arms tight.

"You two got to understand who's boss in this house!" he cried, propelling her firmly toward the sitting-room door. "My wife's got to learn to work! I'm going to show her how to wash dishes! You sit down. Sit down, mother!"

She sat down helpless.

"Put your feet up. Here. Put them on this. Ain't I your son-in-law? You've got to mind me now!" Having settled her there, he ran back to Emily.

"You got to have an apron on. Here, I'll get you an apron!"

And Mrs. Kenworthy listened to a sudden silence and Emily's cooing protest from the kitchen.

"Bob! Quit it! Don't do that! Do you want me to have to go and comb my hair again! You old silly!"

It was altogether a propitious beginning.

The next day there was all the delight of looking over the house and choosing paint and wall papers. The only fly in Emily's ointment was the anticipation of the inevitable meeting with her aunt. She supposed she ought to go and call there and see about taking her possessions out of the house. But she just wouldn't do it. She wasn't going to spoil all her nice, sweet day that way. And then that afternoon, right after dinner, her aunt came to see her! And it was worse than anything she had anticipated.

Mrs. Kenworthy received Mrs. Alden politely, if not cordially, and withdrew, so that Mrs. Alden might have an unhindered opportunity to relieve her mind. And Emily, with all her horrible apprehensions of what was to happen, was quite unprepared for what came. Her aunt forgave her! Her aunt said she would have to lie in the bed she had made. There was nothing now to be done about it. And then she formally asked Emily and Bob to come and live with her! To make her home their home! The proposition staggered the light-hearted bride.

She didn't properly hide her horror of such an idea. Didn't her aunt see, couldn't she see, that what she had married for was, partly, to get out of that house? Emily refused so impulsively, so categorically, that the breach, which the older woman had wanted to close, opened like an all but impassable gulf. Mrs. Alden proceeded, gathering her magnificent martyrdom about her, with her offended magnanimity, until she took her departure.

Emily had scarcely recovered her breath when Mrs. Kenworthy came into the room.

"Look here!" she exclaimed. "Mother, look here what auntie gave me!"

Emily had in her hand a check for twenty-five hundred dollars.

"Why that's a royal present!"

"It's not a present altogether, she said. She said the two thousand was coming to me. It was a little bit of money my mother had—in some bank—when she died, and she had kept it invested for me. She said she had no right to keep it longer. But the five hundred is a wedding present. And, mother, she asked us to go and live with her! I wouldn't do it! Oh, I couldn't bear to think of it! Just imagine if Bob and I had to do that!

I hurt her feelings awfully when I said we couldn't. Do you think I ought to have said we would?"

There are still people living who boldly call Mrs. Kenworthy a saint. But even a haloed Madonna must have to hold fast to her divinity when she passes judgment on the childless woman who has called her son a lazy and commonplace young man. Mrs. Kenworthy weighed her words and managed her tone.

"My dear," she said, inscrutably, as she thought, "you will have to settle that yourself. I couldn't really advise you—in this matter."

And Emily, exulting, said wickedly to herself:

"Aha! She understands. She knows auntie. She's on my side! If it wouldn't hurt her feelings, I would tell her what auntie said. The idea of her saying she wouldn't support Bob. I wonder what his mother would do if I'd just mention auntie said that!" But she refrained.

"Well, anyway, I'm glad I've got this money. A woman ought to have lots of sheets and linen and things when she's married. We'll paint that house on the outside, too, now, with all this. It'll look like a nice little sweet cottage. Then we'll fix the yard up."

"I thought you only had it by the month?"

"Yes, we only have. But we want it to look decent, anyway."

"You could almost buy the place with twenty-five hundred, Emily."

The girl hid a smile. Wasn't Bob's mother a funny old dear to suppose that they would want to buy a little old place like that and settle down in it! When Bob had made a lot of money, they would build a house of their own. They had planned all that.

"There's not very much room in it," she objected, mildly.

Perhaps Bob's mother had understood that discreet little repressed smile.

"You'd have a little place of your own, at least. That's always something."

"Of course it is! It's a lot!" replied Emily, carefully. But when Bob came home she forgot even to tell him what his mother had more or less suggested, in a way, that they might do with that money.

"Well, I'll be dog-goned!" Bob ejaculated when he saw the check. "Who'd 'a' thought it? Didn't you know anything about that money of your mother's, Emily? Do you suppose this is all of it? Sort of funny, just to hand it over to you this way, without any statement of how much it was, or anything. Seems sort of funny it should have been exactly two thousand dollars."

Emily giggled.

"You accusing auntie of keeping some of it back?" The idea "struck her funny." She laughed with glee over it. "You needn't accuse her of such things! She asked you to come and live with her! She wants us to, Bob!"

"What you up to, old girl!"

"I mean what I say! She came over to-day and asked us to come and live with her!"

"I'll be damned!" said Bob.

Those autumn days Emily's head was full of weighty questions of carpets and curtains, of chairs and sheets and towels. Bob marveled at her wisdom. The way she would just make a house—out of nothing—a pretty cozy little house! And how hard she did work! Every minute she wasn't running back and forth up the sunny streets from the stores to the little house, she was helping his mother—the two of them were talking together

as thick as thieves—with bread and biscuits, cakes and pies, and seasonable chili sauces. Every meal there was something on his mother's table Emily had prepared. And his mother loved Emily. He could see that. The girl had made the house a new place for both of them.

It seemed as if the elder Mrs. Kenworthy's happiness was to be complete when she got that letter from Jimmy saying he was bringing his wife and baby out for Thanksgiving. They hadn't been able to come the year before. Mrs. Jimmy hadn't been well. Mrs. Kenworthy was now to have both her sons together, both her daughters, and the wonderful grandson. Emily cried when she heard the news:

"Oh, Bob, we must get into our house by that time! They'll need both the rooms, with the baby's things! We must get our house ready!"

"You bet!"

Emily said to herself that of course she would have to meet Jim sometime. She was so devoted to Bob, so content, so elated over her new life, that she didn't dread it much—not very much, at least. And Jim's wife would be there, and the baby. That would help. She wondered what Jim's wife would be like. She looked searchingly at the picture of her in a wedding dress, which Mrs. Kenworthy got out to show her. Mrs. Kenworthy seemed to think this visit a critical occasion, though she didn't say so.

"You know, Emily, I've never had a chance really to get acquainted with Jimmy's wife," she remarked once. "That's really why I'm so glad she's coming. I've hardly had an opportunity—to talk with her at all. That counts for so much, doesn't it? You and I have had such a good chance to know

each other, these days you've been here. I wish Louise could have come and stayed with me, for my sake."

Every detail of the arrangements for that visit Mrs. Kenworthy discussed with the girl who was eager to help with them. Everything of Bob's was to be taken down to his new home, the closets all cleared and ready for Jim's wife's lovely frocks to hang in. Emily realized that the prospect of having Jim's family even for two days would keep Bob's mother from being too conscious of the emptiness of his room. They arranged and rearranged the furniture. The curtains had been washed for Bob's bride. Everything was so clean, so ready, that there was positively nothing more to be done to the rooms. They planned the dinner. Jim's wife would be used to wonderful feasts. Her people lived expensively. Jim's mother could afford a good dinner for her. Nothing was to be lacking. The preparation of that dinner was a culinary love affair. Jimmy did so like nuts when he was a boy. Robert liked mince pie best, so there should be a mince pie for Robert. Emily wondered if anyone ever got as much fun out of a Thanksgiving dinner as her mother-in-law. That woman thought Jimmy's baby was quite old enough to have a stripped turkey bone to suck. She remembered how Jimmy's father used to let him have the drumstick of a chicken, from which the meat had been removed, and how Jimmy used to sit in his high chair—she wished she'd kept that high chair, but some one had needed it—and gnaw away at it like a little dog. There was nothing in her kitchen that was for that woman merely what it was. She spoke of her frying-pan as if it were a sister. She sentimentalized the teakettle—it was a bosom companion. What could mere Fate do to a woman whose cook-stove reservoir was a miracle, whose oven was a very act of God? Emily

couldn't help laughing at her. However, Emily couldn't help laughing at anything, because, some way, mirth bubbled up within her.

She had got a shock, to be sure—a shock that almost took her breath away—the day she was going through Bob's college trunk, clearing out "trash" from it, so that she could pack his things in it for the new house. That discovery had made her—dizzy, almost. But she had thought it away, she had got used to it. She knew what she was going to do about it, and except for little thrills of soberness, that would come when she thought of meeting Jim, she was more happy than she had ever supposed she could be. It was much nicer being married than she had ever supposed.

Even Thanksgiving morning was perfect. The first snow of the season was falling in great soft flakes. Emily and Bob hurried down to the station together, under one umbrella. The train drew in. It stopped. Emily could hear her heart beating. Jim was getting off. Jim with a great parcel. Unencumbered by a sign of a family. Jim alone! That was one shock. The other was his appearance. She drew in her breath. Jim was so handsome, so stunning, so distinguished. She had forgotten.

The brothers were upon each other. Emily was realizing what it was Jim was saying. The baby had waked up with a great cold that morning. His mother couldn't expose him to the risks of a holiday-crowded train. Jim was sorry. Jim was perfect. He was shaking her hand in a brotherly way. Perfectly forgetful. Perfectly distant. Strangely insincere in his explanation about his wife. Strangely—she didn't know what—unapproachable—distinguished.

He had to stop and shake hands with half the townsmen on

the station, with Bob standing behind him, grinning with pleasure. They wouldn't need the carriage they had got to protect the baby from those large wet flakes. They sent it away. They hurried babbling up the hill together, like three children.

Mrs. Kenworthy saw them from the window. She heard them scraping their feet on the rug she had put for that purpose on the porch. She saw them, and they saw her face fall.

"Jimmy!" she exclaimed, even as he kissed her. "What's the matter? Where's the baby? Where's Louise?"

And Jimmy told that story—that lie. ("Yes," thought Emily, "that's what it is. It's a lie. He isn't telling the truth!") The baby had caught cold. Louise was so sorry. She had made him come alone, so his mother wouldn't be too much disappointed. Emily watched Mrs. Kenworthy. Mrs. Kenworthy never turned a hair. "She doesn't believe it, either!" Emily thought. She wondered if Jim supposed she did. But they were all for making the best of it. Mrs. Kenworthy's Thanksgiving party wasn't to be more desolated than necessary by the absence of her grandson.

She had to be in the kitchen. And so had Jimmy, therefore. He followed her about. He sat on the edge of the kitchen table. Emily was there, helping. And Bob wasn't going to miss everything by staying in the sitting room. The kitchen overflowed. Mrs. Kenworthy shooed them all out of it. But they came back. They just all played about together. Emily wondered how she could have supposed there would be any awkwardness in meeting Jim under these exuberant circumstances.

It was a charming meal. Emily could hardly do it justice, because she was so interested in its background. She simply marveled at Jim, as Bob was quite naturally and habitually

doing. Jim was amazing with his mother. He naturally would, of course, appear to great advantage with her. He had come out to give her pleasure. He set himself to do that. He "jollied" her "to a finish," Emily said to herself. He recalled historic jokes of his boyhood Thanksgivings—of skating and sleighing and frozen toes. He teased her about her favorite economies, wisely, kindly. He questioned her and he catechised her about her charities to the neighbors. Mrs. Kenworthy before him was like a piano beneath the hands of a master. No wonder she adored him. No wonder she was always talking of her Jimmy. Bob sat thoroughly enjoying it. Proud of Jim, Bob was. Proud and happy about Jim, without a thought of envy.

And Emily came in for her share of the merry Jim's nonsense, just as if she had been his sister for years, just as if his brother's bride was a delightful new source of interest, just as if he had never—kissed her—that way. Oh, Jim was clever! He was deceitful. He was brilliantly deceitful. She wondered how he could sit there deceiving his mother and brother so completely. It never occurred to Emily that she was pretending quite as successfully as he was. When dinner was over, they went into the sunny sitting room. That beloved Jimmy brought his unwieldy package in, sat down on the floor, and began undoing it. He had brought his mother a pair of blankets, soft, rich, dazzling white blankets for her bed, bound about with satin ribbon richly—blankets to delight the heart of a woman who had no magnificent, wonderful son to make her a gift of them.

Mrs. Kenworthy expostulated. Jimmy was extravagant. Jimmy must stop spending all his money on her! They were too good for her. She had others. Jim interrupted her. She couldn't fool him! He knew the old worn, thin blankets she

had on her bed. He knew to whom she'd given away the better pair. Just let him catch her giving these away, or using them on the spare bed for a guest. He'd fix her. A frightful threat, the way he looked at her! He had a gift for Emily, too, for his sister. He brought a box of chocolates out of his bag. To-morrow or the next day it might be worth opening, he said.

And then, the dinner left sitting as it was on the table, Bob demanded that they go and show Jim his house. Mother must come along. She needed exercise. It was dusk, now, and cold, and they hurried along. And they played about from corner to corner of Bob's and Emily's nest. Jim understood the arrangements, and admired them irreproachably. And Bob filled the hard-coal stove for the night, and they went all together back to celebrate the kitchen rites of washing the dishes and getting supper slices of cold turkey. And then Emily and Bob left Jim alone with his mother, and came back to their second night in their own house.

But Emily couldn't sleep for some time, that night. She had to think things over. She had to consider it all, and sigh—with content, sometimes,—with wonder, sometimes, not with regret—that is, not exactly with regret. What a satisfactory day it had been! Satisfaction was a new word for the girl, a word to ponder over. Why was everything Mrs. Kenworthy did so eminently satisfactory to her? Why was that family party just a kind of revelation of what satisfaction might be? A common little party. A common sort of happiness. But is happiness ever common, she wondered. She wondered if life would go on in this deeply, commonly, happy way. It was so strange, so beyond understanding. She had so nearly married Jim. The reason she hadn't married Jim was now—just nothing at all. If she hadn't foolishly lost her temper for once, just at that

crisis, she would have been Jim's wife, likely. If she hadn't just—told a lie. She didn't care much. She didn't care at all, she told herself, indignantly. Didn't she love her husband? Wasn't Bob just perfectly sweet and kind to her? Didn't he adore her? Didn't she like being adored and needed? But still, Jim—Jim, now that she saw him again—Jim seemed Bob polished, intensified, glorified. It did Emily good to see him appreciating his mother. Bob didn't half appreciate her.

Strange how she had shrunk from meeting Jim! What had she expected? Wasn't he his mother's own son? Had she imagined that Jim might say something—unpleasant? Jim always landed on his feet, gracefully. That was characteristic of him. As if he would ever think of her apart from Bob! She had misjudged him. She had always misjudged him. He was right, that time—that time they quarreled—and she had been wrong. What must he think of her? Of his brother's wife? She hadn't had a chance to say a word to him. But she would. She would explain how it was. She was determined to say that to him before he went back.

They danced the next evening. The high-school alumni always had a dance in the opera house the Friday after Thanksgiving. Bob made Jim stay for it. "Lordy, Jim, you're an officer! You're the president or something. You ought to stay. You can stay till the eleven-thirty at least. They'll think you've got the swell head if you don't." He stayed, accordingly, and danced with the girls he had played with as a boy, as a young man. He danced, too, with his sister-in-law. A man would, naturally, dance with a sister-in-law more than once when she was so pretty to look at. And Emily wanted to dance with him because she had that to say to him, and it wouldn't come out of her mouth, some way. Jim talked on, his steady

flow of lovable nonsense, her irreproachable brother-in-law, Mrs. Kenworthy's well-brought-up and favorite son. He danced his last dance with her. He was going. She went with him toward the door of the hall. She went with him out of the main room, into the long dimly lighted entrance passage where the men's and women's wraps hung together. She stood there, flushed and troubled, and desperately in earnest. Jim was taking down his overcoat. He was getting into it. She was helping him.

"Look here, Jim!" she murmured. "Jim, I want to tell you something! I never read that book. You know, *that* book—that day! I didn't tell you the truth! I—was mad at auntie. She had been scolding me about what I read. I never knew what was in it, even, till this week. I found it in Bob's box, when we were moving his things! I didn't know there was a book so bad as that in the world! You were right. I—I wanted to tell you. Because—I'm Bob's wife! Honestly, I didn't, Jim! I don't believe my father ever read it, if his name *was* in it. I don't believe he knew what was in it, any more than I did!"

Jim had stopped before her, paralyzed, before she had said half of it. Tears had welled up in her eyes, she didn't know why. She turned to hide them. And Jim—he came toward her. Surely his arms were stretching out to her! She cried, whispering brokenly:

"Oh, you can't kiss me *now,* Jim!"

But he had turned away. Bob was there. Bob was saying:

"I'll walk over with you to the depot. Come along, Emily. Why, what's the matter, Emily!"

"Somebody stepped on my foot! My foot hurts, Bob!"

Bob flamed out indignantly. Who had stepped on her foot? Jim's face was turned away still. Bob couldn't possibly suspect

anything. Bob wasn't like that. He got her a chair. "Take your slipper off!" he said, tenderly. "Let me see."

But she wouldn't. Bob must go with Jim. The brothers went out together.

She was quite herself when Bob came hurrying back to her.

"I'm just tired, dear," she said. "My feet hurt. Not very much. If only some one hadn't stepped on me. Let's not stay very late."

"You've been working too hard, running back and forth all the week. That's what it is. Let's go home." ("Let's go home" was to be the sum of Bob's suggestions, the perfect expression of his attitude toward all social gatherings to which he accompanied his wife for the rest of her life. But Emily couldn't foresee that then.)

"Oh, we can't go just yet. It wouldn't do." That was to be her answer for some years. "But let's get away as soon as we can."

She had to dance again. Her partners found her unusually silent. She was struggling with her humiliation, hiding her excitement. How could she have said such a thing to Jim! How *could* she have said that! As if he would have wanted to kiss her! As if Jim Kenworthy would have kissed his brother's wife slyly, in the dark! Oh, she would never get over being ashamed of those words. But he had—she had thought that was what he was going to do. He had—he had just—flashed upon her that old, that old eager, determined expression of his face. At least, that's what she had thought. She had thought he was going to— Why, his arms were almost around her! she had imagined. But of course he was just getting into his coat. She had insulted him. How could she have thought him capable of such a thing—Mrs. Kenworthy's Jimmy, after he

had been so—so perfectly—right to her all the time? If only she hadn't said that to him! She had made things a dozen times worse than ever. Now he would think that Bob's wife—was suspecting him of—of making love to her—behind Bob's back. She never wanted to see him again, as long as she lived. But of course she would have to. He would be out again, as usual, to see his mother. And he would act just as if she had never said such an outrageous thing to him. For Bob's sake he would just pretend—she was—decent. Oh, how could she have said those terrible words! But his face—his face—pitiful—and eager. . . .

Jim Kenworthy, meanwhile, the gay, the debonair Jimmy, sat huddled into his seat in the overheated smoking car, cursing himself, as was his custom, but more bitterly, more excitedly than usual, gritting, as it were, the ground-away teeth of his soul. Now *this* had happened! He couldn't even go out to eat Thanksgiving dinner with his mother in a poky little old town without getting in worse, making a fool of himself, putting himself more deeply than ever in the wrong! Who would have supposed that *that* would happen? Why, in another minute, in another second, if he hadn't seen Bob coming—Good Lord! Bob would have found him—hugging his bride! What a ghastly mistake! What a damned mess he had made of things! Why, just last night he had been thanking Heaven for Bob's happiness! Let him enjoy it while he can, he had said to himself bitterly. It couldn't last long. Bob had been married three weeks, and was still happy—for a wonder. Three weeks! Jim himself had known before three days what his marriage had let him in for. If any man had had enough of women, it was Jim Kenworthy. He knew them. He was done with them, through with them, finished with them. All he wanted for the

rest of his life was to keep as far away as possible from them. He had never given the problem of meeting Emily a second thought. There was no problem about it, from his point of view. He was too far sickened by his relationship with his wife to have any silly sentiment about a girl left in him. One of them was as bad as another. He had been glad for Bob, savagely glad that after three weeks Bob was unhurt, whole, unwounded, alive, happy. Every time he thought of his mother he felt more deeply chagrined by the situation. He had meant well. He had been in love with the girl he had married—he had supposed so, at any rate. He hadn't really known her. He had never expected anything like this. Hadn't he tried with all his soul to mend matters? Hadn't he tried—all possible hopes of a reconciliation, of some possible adjustment? He had meant to be a decent man, a decent husband. He had thought, only the first of this week again, that they had patched things up—that they could live in some distant peace—he had so wanted for once to appear to his mother respectably married, reasonably happy. He had been a fool to imagine he could carry such a pretence through. By Thanksgiving morning they were sinking, floundering in the same old hopeless, intolerable antagonism. And at his mother's he had cut loose from that burden of unhappiness for her sake. He had feigned hilarity, successfully, he had reason to suppose. For it was easy there. There were peace there, with her, and ease. In his own home silence even was a conflict, decent courtesy a weakening struggle. But out there, away from it, there came rest from struggle, and forgetfulness, and almost—peace. He had been unafraid and off guard. And that unconsidered girl, his brother's wife, had come over him all of a sudden, just as she used to—a storm, a gentle storm of emotion; she had stirred

him more passionately, more deeply, than he had supposed anything would ever stir him again. She revealed herself—unconsciously, he would say that for her—by a word, by a gesture, such a simple beauty of woman that he fell down before her—he loved her—with fear. He remembered how she used to do that—how she had filled him with a sense of her distance—her loftiness. Good God! Why hadn't be married her! Why hadn't he married any woman but the one he did! If he had married Emily— Why hadn't he, anyway? They had quarreled. He had thought her intolerably proud of her position, a silly, haughty little snob. And now she had settled down to marry Bob. She had become a daughter to his mother. His mother hadn't found her pretentious. His mother had found her strangely dear. She couldn't praise her enough. Good Heavens! What a ghastly escape he had had! If Bob had seen that—if his mother had known that—this girl she had taken to her heart— Jim gritted his teeth—his teeth that were so used to being gritted—and swore to himself. What was he to do now? That was the question before him always. As long as his mother lived he would stand it, some way. And there was that poor innocent little baby, born not of love, but of some desperate endeavor after it. What was to become of that helpless child, who might better not have been born into their humiliation? It didn't matter about his wife. Jim didn't believe she could be happy under any circumstances. He didn't believe that she had the possibility in her. But there was the child to be brought up some way, and there was his mother, whose old age wasn't to be saddened if he could help it. She had had a sad enough life, surely. All the peace there had been for Jim Kenworthy in the world, for the last year or two, he had found with her, where he forgot his home. And now—

his brother's wife had stepped into that home. Never again would Jim Kenworthy sit ungirded there, even. He would never be able to tell when that girl, his brother's wife, might drive him suddenly mad—another second, and Bob would have seen that. What an unspeakably complicated mess life is! Damn everything in the world, said Jim Kenworthy, trying not to see that adorable, innocent, earnest face, flushed, tearful. He could have loved that woman. Surely he could have loved her. And she was Bob's. He couldn't kiss her *now.* That was what she had—wanted? Was she sorry? Her voice had been —regretful, surely. It couldn't have been that. There was something strangely—frightfully—lofty about that woman—unapproachable entirely.

Chapter Five

Emily settled down with her whole light heart to the business of being the wife of a penniless man. The twenty-five hundred dollars lacked one of the most necessary attributes of money—it had no lasting quality. It just quietly vanished away. Bills began ultimately to pour in.

"Why, the damned old skunk!" Bob cried, when he saw the butcher's bill. "Who'd have thought old Maddagen would have done that! I always supposed he was *honest!*"

Even when his mother had persuaded him that the bill was probably correct, it was the butcher he blamed for the size of it, and not Emily. How could she know any better? She'd always been used to the best cuts. And besides, she giggled adorably over it. "Why, Bob, we could have bought two or three cows for that much! Just imagine you and me eating three great big cows!" And he had to laugh, to see it "striking her so funny."

But as things went from bad to worse, turning to Mrs. Kenworthy became, instead of a pretty gesture, a clutching at the means of survival. Mrs. Kenworthy knew how to stretch a dollar all over a week. She knew how to make cake without butter, custard without eggs, soup without stock, and jams without sugar. She had been trained in the bitter school of experience which sees that its lessons are always mastered. She had known how to make the narrow cell of her poverty beautiful, in an austere way. But Emily needed room to live carelessly.

She didn't get it. After two years they had to give up the honeymoon cottage. They went then to live in three dreary rooms behind Bob's law office over a drug store on Main Street.

Emily maintained they were more convenient than the cottage. She didn't mind doing her washing, for Bob was so good about carrying the water up the long back stairs and emptying the tubs. Besides, she said to herself repeatedly, in the choice slang of that year, she would rather live in one room and a sink with Bob, than in her aunt's house. It was true, too, although she had come to looking longingly at the hats in the windows of the town millinery, displays at which she used formerly to make disrespectful little grimaces. She thought she was happy. And then she began to realize that she had never known before what happiness meant. She was going to have a baby.

Her aunt, hearing of the impending calamity, gave her a substantial check. Mrs. Kenworthy helped her with her housework; and after the baby was born she would care for her two or three afternoons a week when she was able, to give Emily a few free hours. When Jim came carefully down with his mother to see his niece, he bought her a baby-buggy worthy of Emily. That delighted Bob. He used to bump it lovingly up and down the long stair the more proudly because it was his brother's gift. On that occasion, too, Jim paid the doctor's bill and the grocer's bill. Bob regretted the necessity of allowing him to, but still, Jim had always been almost a father to him.

To Emily he was in no way paternal. She realized how carefully he approached her. Now that she had a baby, she was of course altogether Bob's. Yet when Jim had to have supper at Bob's with his mother, Emily became acutely conscious of the shabbiness of her little dining room, of the gaslight, the worn linen, most of all of the fact that she was no housekeeper. She never imagined that Jim always wanted to cry out an apology for his brother to her, that Bob had brought her to such a "hole." He would devote himself circumspectly to the baby;

if he helped her clear away the dishes he was afraid to say more than, "You're some cook, Emily!" He never dared to say even how much he admired the grace with which she carried herself through the meagerness his brother had inflicted upon her. He didn't dare to seem to notice the meagerness.

If the first home of Emily's had made her aunt sniff, that "drug-store place" made her groan. But the next place the Governor's granddaughter moved into made her shudder violently. The utterly cheap little house recently put together in the addition to town where the factories were increasing, Bob's unique client gave him for a nominal rent until the courts should settle the question of its ownership. Emily's neighbors there were a Hungarian family who kept goats, and the colored barber of the town. When Jim saw the shack—it was scarcely more than that—all he could say was, "You've certainly got a breeze here, Emily. And she said: "Yes, haven't we? And it's such a good place for Martha to play. Isn't she looking well?" But after he went away, Mrs. Kenworthy urged Bob more persistently than ever to come and live with her. Jim had said she needed company now, and he would build a wing on the little house if Emily would come and live there. Bob wasn't willing to "live off his mother." He came home a few days later and told Emily he had rented his law office and got a job as a mechanic in the town's one garage. Emily, knowing her aunt must be saying, "I told you so!" would never acknowledge even to herself that she felt any humiliation over her husband's social descent. Besides, it was a comfort to have a regular wage to live on.

When little Martha was old enough to go to school she was saved—providentially, it seemed to some interested in her—from having to be enrolled with the uncombed foreign children

of the factory neighborhood, by the sudden illness of Mrs. Kenworthy. Her condition left no other course open to Bob. So he moved his family back home, not as a hungry son, but as a dutiful one. In the next three years, while Mrs. Kenworthy's life faded out, Jim came at least once a month to see that she had every possible comfort. He was living in New York by that time, and going to Texas many times a year to look after an undervalued inheritance of his wife's on which oil had been found. He had always been a night or two on the train when he arrived, travel-stained and weary. He was always harassed, always worn-looking, always concerned about his mother, whose failing mind grew more pitiful, always burdened with his business affairs—and yet never once did he arrive in that house without exactly the right little delightful gift for his adoring niece, who prayed for him hopefully every night of her life. And some way, they all pitied the prosperous Jim.

Emily pitied him because he was grieved for his mother. When Mrs. Kenworthy didn't recognize Bob, he said it was "old age" and it didn't worry him. But Jim fairly winced when his mother's irrationalities smote him. And it seemed only when he was there that she said terrible things about the days of her poverty, about the times she had gone hungry for her boys' sake. And now they had all deserted her, she would say, sadly, while he bent forward, saying: "I'm here, mother. Here's Jimmy!" Emily almost wished sometimes that he wouldn't come any more. But at intervals Mrs. Kenworthy was rational, and nothing would persuade him to miss a chance of seeing her in that state.

And Bob in his greasy overalls pitied Jim. Emily said once to him:

"I wish Jim didn't have to go tearing across the continent

this way. It's wearing him out. I wish he didn't have to go to Texas so often."

And Bob retorted: "If I had a wife like his I'd never leave Texas. But he's got to go back and see the kid, I suppose." He seemed to hate Jim's wife. "The slimy little snake!" he ejaculated, when he thought of her.

Emily always protested. He hadn't anything tangible to base his judgment on. He didn't really know her. He had not even often seen her. He and Emily had spent a night at Jim's once when she was there, in Chicago. She had had an engagement and been going out. She had excused herself, Emily thought, quite rightly. And Emily, in her street clothes, had felt ill dressed and awkward in the presence of the small slight woman so gorgeously arrayed for the evening's formalities. And she and Bob and Jim had sat there by the fire at home, having a good visit. Jim had been perfect to her, as usual cordial and charming and brotherly. And when Bob had shut the door into the guest room he had looked resentfully about him, he had gone and felt with his fingers the taffeta curtains at the window, and sat down on the bed, with a great sigh. "Poor old Jim!" he had said.

"What's the matter? Don't you like her? Don't you think she's pretty? I felt like a great overgrown cow beside her. Don't you think she's pretty, Bob?"

Bob turned incredulously toward her. "Who do you mean?" he asked.

"Why, Louise, of course!"

"That damned slimy little snake!"

"Why, Bob!"

"I'd rather have married a black stove poker than that—

thing! What's he to do? What can a man do with a wife like that? If she was mine, I'd choke her!"

"The idea of your talking that way! Why don't you like her?"

"Like her! Like that thing? Why *should* I like her? It makes me sick every time I think of Jim with her. I'm never coming to this house again while she's here."

"Oh, Bob! Why, Jim would be hurt! He wouldn't like it! He would know you don't like her!"

"What of it? Can't you see he grits his teeth every time he looks at her!"

"You're absurd! You're silly! She's a clever woman. She has—style."

"Damn style! She hasn't got any sense. What beats me is, how Jim ever fell for her."

And his sentiments toward his sister-in-law never changed.

And Mrs. Kenworthy, rational or irrational, moaned over her son. A warm afternoon during one of his visits, Emily had gone up to her room, and almost before she had seated herself her mother had gone wearily to sleep. Emily sat perfectly still, unwilling to disturb what she knew would be but a short nap. And after a few minutes, Mrs. Kenworthy woke abruptly and raised her head.

"What was that noise?" she asked.

"I didn't hear anything. I didn't notice."

"Listen, Emily!"

A car or two hooted by. Then:

"Did you hear *that!* Do you know what it was?"

"It's Martha playing in the yard." Emily started to rise, to enforce silence.

"No, it isn't. That's Jimmy. That's Jimmy laughing, Emily!"

Tears sprang to the old eyes. "I haven't heard Jimmy laugh for a long time. He's never laughed right since he was married."

"Well, I suppose—he seems so busy."

"'Sh! Listen!"

They listened.

"I know what he's doing. He's teaching Martha to sing backward. He made that game up himself. He taught Robert to do that. He doesn't sing backward now often."

"I dare say not. Not many business men have time to sing backward, mother, whatever that is. He teaches her something absurd every time he's here."

"Oh, my poor Jimmy!" And she lay trying not to cry lest he should see her eyes red.

And as they all pitied him, Emily admired him more and more. She was certain it wasn't love she had for him. It was an overflowing admiration. He had always been lovely to his mother, and, now that she was old and ill and weak, his manner to her was the most beautiful thing, Emily told herself, that she had ever seen of human relationship. Jim's voice had more caressing tones than any other voice. He could make even his morning greetings to her so infinitely sweet. And with little Martha, too, his manner was perfect. Perfect, but still sometimes it sent pangs through Emily. One morning from the dining room she saw him sitting in the living room with her little daughter on his knee. She was talking earnestly to him, and he had one hand under her chin, turning the little face up toward him, and the other hand stroked her hair so gently, so softly, so exactly as it had stroked Martha's mother's hair, and on his face there was an expression, so wistful, so bitter, that something almost broke loose in Emily's heart, and she couldn't breathe quite easily till he was well on his way to Texas. And once when

his mother was very ill, and he was about to leave, he said to her, trying to speak calmly, "I *hate* going this time, Emily." And then his voice sort of broke, and he cried: "I don't think I could go back and trust mother to another woman in the world but you, Emily! I can never repay you for this!" And she said, "Puff! Repay me! I've never had so little to do since I was married—with a maid and a laundress and a nurse." And then she had meant to say, "Besides, Jim, you know it's a pleasure to take care of your mother." That was all she had meant to say. But she said, "You know it's a pleasure for me to take care of *your* mother, Jim!" These words came out of her untrustworthy mouth, and Jim stood there, growing red, looking at her, so that she could have cried, "Oh, you can't kiss me *now* Jim!" But he turned away before she did.

"Is a man a cur," he was asking himself, "that he should make insulting love to his poor old mother's one daughter?"

But *would* it be insulting? Sometimes Emily's voice— What a fool he was to imagine such a thing! . . .

Chapter Six

Mrs. Kenworthy died, bereaving the whole community, and ten months later Mrs. Alden died. Emily came into her inheritance and moved back into her grandfather's house, from Mrs. Kenworthy's. Bob had wanted his mother's little estate settled at once. He had wanted to sell the house, so that he could have his share of its value to invest in a garage. But Jim had delayed and protested. Emily understood why, gratefully. He wasn't going to have Bob take her back again to some little hole like that factory house.

And then, when she moved into her own house, she realized how humble the Kenworthy house had been. She delighted in "the old Fiske place." She was well qualified now to appreciate it. She knew what it was not to have an extra towel, not to have a spare sheet for a guest bed. And she had come back to closets and closets of bed linen, of table linen, to piles and piles of monogramed towels. She had come back to large rooms and high ceilings, to wide porches, and light closets, and shining tiled bathrooms, and graceful stairs. She had come back to well-kept lawns and thick shade. She came back to an efficient maid-of-all-work—a very blessing to a woman like Emily—and a laundress who had been able to please even Mrs. Alden. She came back to an income which allowed smart hats and charming frocks. She hadn't realized how she had missed these things. They seemed infinitely good to her. She regretted more than ever that she hadn't been able to return more gratitude, to give at least a little affection to the old woman who had saved these things so scrupulously for her.

She felt that, though she had been brought up in the house when it was a museum, her daughter might be brought up with it for a gracious home. She pulled up the curtains and let the sun rollick across the beautiful floors. She banished to the attic the most uncomfortable chairs and sofas and the unnecessary tables. "It'll be great sport for Martha to come across these relics some day, when I'm dead and gone," she thought. "She'll love them, if she never has to walk in awe of them, as I had to." She hied herself to Chicago and bought some new chairs and davenports, with springs and down cushions. If she didn't choose them with her eyes shut, "from the feel of them," as she had threatened to, at least she considered the comfort of them thoroughly. She intended to have chairs in which she could sit and read a book through without having her bones ache. She watched all that spring the new shoots coming up in the garden. It was *her* garden now, and she was planning to rearrange the phlox, so that their magenta wouldn't swear so frightfully at the tiger lilies. That combination had been an eyesore to her for years. She sighed time after time, day after day, with delight over her possessions.

She had lived in her home only a few months when the great calamity befell her. She was then a woman to whom the thirties were far more becoming than the teens had been, a woman whose environment, perhaps for the first time, perfectly accorded with her great capacity for easy, calm happiness. It was June, the fullness of June, the season when a little old friend of Mrs. Kenworthy's and Mrs. Alden's made her annual visit to the town where she had lived for many years. She always spent a day or two with Bob's mother, and Mrs. Alden always had a tea for her. So it occurred to Emily that

she ought to invite half a dozen of the older neighbors to have tea with her as usual in the garden.

This little old Mrs. Dement had a face like a Tibetan, with eyebrows which slanted up, and little black, shiny eyes, and a gentle Christian mouth. She had been Emily's Sunday-school teacher for years, and Emily had always loved her fondly and secretly, because she caressed the little girls with her voice and her eyes. She beamed upon them, and she patted and cuddled them, as it were, with her words. And she called them "You dears!" and "You little darlings!" right out loud. The other besashed and bedecked young female Congregationalists laughed at her behind her back, because of these gushing endearments. But they were little girls who got endearments at home. Emily had basked in her overflowing kindness.

And besides that, Mrs. Dement said strange things in Sunday school, which teased one's mind, not like the things other people said who talked out loud in church. One day she told the little girls in front of her, very seriously, that the great good God arranges the world so perfectly, to keep it spinning along through space, that if one little ant, just one very young and thin ant, even, should crawl, not up the right side, but up the wrong side of a blade of grass, the whole world would lose its delicate balance and topple and fall away from beneath their feet into destruction. But they were witnesses of the fact that it never did fall away, never had fallen away, never would fall away from them. And Emily could recall how earnestly she had watched the world balancing, that next week, how she had marveled at God's direction of the little ants. Every bird that flew alighted, sure enough, upon the very twig that the world needed it to alight upon. Every caterpillar chose miraculously the right side of the right fallen leaf. It was wonderful. And

it was true, as she had proved for herself. The world never trembled; it never even toppled a little bit. And every Sunday of the year, Mrs. Dement made all her pupils stand in a row in the pew in which they were assembled, after the lesson was over, no matter what it had been about, and say together a verse which she believed it was good for little girls to say. It went like this, and the rhythm of it was still in Emily's mind: "Be ye *kind* to one another, for*giv*ing one another, even as God for Christ's sake, hath for*giv*en you." And it was that woman, that woman, of all possible women, who, Emily really believed, would have bitten off her tongue before she would have caused her such pain, who inadvertently told the news that went crashing down through the security and happiness of Emily's life like a wrecking bomb.

She had been feeling unusually unfit the day or two before the tea. She was a very strong woman, with never an ache or a pain. Yet the morning of the party she felt so ill that she had thought for a time of 'phoning her guests that she had had to cancel her invitations. When they were almost ready to go, scattered about looking at the peonies, she had seen an opportunity of leaving them together while she had a moment to herself. She hurried toward the house. In the path she saw a little white shawl lying, that she knew had been around Mrs. Farwell's shoulders. She saw it, then, lying in the path, and she felt too sick to stoop and pick it up. She went on into the house, from the back yard, and sank down in the first chair she came to. It was, ironically enough, one of those new and comfortable ones she had bought in Chicago. She sat resting her head in her hands, quiet, for a moment. Then she realized that on the front porch, Mrs. Dement and Mrs. James were

visiting together. She was scarcely conscious of what they were saying. And then:

"Well, she could die easy, that way. She knew Bob couldn't speculate with the rest of her money."

"I hear it's tied up tight. I hear Emily can only get the income month by month. That was very clever of her, really. She hadn't any right to make the will that way. She had to leave it to Emily. She had only life use of it."

"Yes, and of course Emily is thankful she did it. It's safe for Martha. Bob'll never get his hands on the principal. I wonder if he ever paid back what he lost."

"I heard she got about two thousand of it. But I don't know whether it's true. He wasn't earning a living, hardly. What could she do? She couldn't get anything by prosecuting him. And then there was his mother, of course. All she wanted was the satisfaction of scaring him so he'd never do it again. My son says he never speculates now. He's learned his lesson. Of course Bob thought he had a sure thing, or he wouldn't have used her money—I feel sure of that."

"Well, I hope so. But that's no excuse for him. She had told him to put it into farm mortgages. I was never so surprised in my life as I was when I heard that. I said to myself, 'If you can't trust Martha Kenworthy's son to handle your money for you, who in the world *can* you trust?' A woman can't do all her business herself. I declare, I used to wonder if it was safe to give my own nephews money to invest for me, after I heard that."

Mrs. James gave a protesting little laugh.

"The idea, Mary! As if John and Willie aren't as sound as a dollar! They aren't playing the markets, to get rich quick! I couldn't help thinking, when I saw Emily so safely established

here for the rest of her life, how clever Jane Alden was. How many women could have done what she did? And, of course, she knew how hard up Bob was, and was trying to help him a little when she gave him that money to buy her mortgages with. It would have killed Martha Kenworthy!"

The bird had alighted on the wrong side of the twig that time. There was a chair not a dozen steps away which Emily might have chosen—an old Windsor chair, where she wouldn't have heard those low-spoken words. Or if she had paused even long enough to restore the little scarf to the old shoulders, her beautiful simple life wouldn't have become in a flash so complicated.

Afterward she never thought of that afternoon without marveling that she had behaved so admirably. She had simply sat still for a time. And then she had risen like one in a dream, and gone to the hall, and looked in the mirror. She had powdered her nose mechanically, and walked out to her guests, forgetting her nausea, and seen them depart as a hostess must. After that she had gone into the house and up the stairs, and, locking the door into her room, that door that hadn't been locked before for years, she had thrown herself down on the bed.

Here was a situation no decent woman could for a moment endure—and she was to have to endure it for—how long? She felt as if some nauseating refuse had been thrown over her, which fate forbade her to wash away. Here was a maddening wound, and she had to act sanely, to decide wisely. If it had been anything else, she thought, wildly—if Bob had deserted her for another woman, if he had even taken money from anyone but her aunt! But he had practically stolen money. He had dishonestly lost money not his own. Martha's

father was a—thief. And some fine day, some easy afternoon, that fact would leap out and devour the daughter as it was now devouring the mother. Emily's impulse was to take the child and run away—to save her daughter from this intolerable humiliation. She felt like renouncing her inheritance. The worst part of it was that by doing that—by doing anything else—she could never repay the money to her aunt. That woman even yet came from her very grave to chill life by her cold rectitude, her horrible superiority—her freezing forbearance toward Bob. Many things suddenly became plain to Emily, as she lay there. She had never before even wondered why her aunt's strange will had taken the management of the estate out of Bob's hands entirely forever. It had seemed natural, because her aunt had always despised Bob. But people had known, even then, when the will was made public, what it signified. And Emily knew now why Bob had never even commented on the strange restrictions which her aunt—those women said and Bob himself must have known—had no right to make. Now the fact that Emily's income was paid her by the bank month by month was a shame. Bob hadn't dared to suggest that she protest. People were discussing it. They were gossiping about it. Since when, she wondered. They were supposing that of course Emily Kenworthy knew all about it. All those old neighbors had come to her tea knowing Bob had speculated and lost money given him to invest safely. They had come out of pity toward her. Every act of common neighborly kindness which had been shown to her since she had come back into her home seemed now to spring from a pity which made her writhe. They supposed she had come back brazenly, not condescending to pretend to mourn deeply for its defrauded mistress, throwing the house open to joy and sunshine, to make it com-

fortable for the man who had preyed upon her aunt. She couldn't stand the thought.

She couldn't imagine when it had happened. But she had to realize that some noon, some evening, Bob had come home to her polluted by that dishonesty, hiding his baseness, going on as usual—*Bob* had done that—whom she had always supposed she understood—Bob, to whom she had never imputed the faintest capacity for deceit. Some day he had come back to her from that shameful humiliation, from that scene when her aunt had threatened him with prosecution, to scare him so that he would never "play" the markets again. She wanted sorely to know when it had happened. She wondered how, if all those women had known all about it, Mrs. Kenworthy had been spared the knowledge. She wanted to know if Jim knew it, if Jim had paid her aunt the money, if he had supposed Emily knew it. She felt like going straight to New York to see Jim, to ask him to tell her the truth.

She couldn't ask Bob. If she spoke to Bob about it, if she saw him standing before her, ashamed, guilty, her marriage with him would be over. Perhaps it was all over, anyway. She didn't know. But she mustn't say anything to him till she was sure. She would just take Martha and go East, and put her in school, and then take her away somewhere—anywhere—to Europe—and keep her away. . . .

She didn't go down to supper that evening. She wasn't able to eat the next day. The shock seemed to have prostrated her. She was wretched, as the days passed, and weak. Fortunately the weather was unusually hot. She could offer that as her excuse. She kept Martha in the house. She was afraid now, for her, if she should let her play with her little girl friends, some one might taunt the child—some playmate might say to

her, "Your father is a—" She saw she must get away at once, as soon as she felt able, as soon as the heat wave made it possible to travel.

And then she came to realize that it wasn't only the revelation of Bob's perfidy that was sickening her. It was another horror which came slowly, irrevocably over her, a growing calamity which a month before would have filled her with singing. She had always wanted a sister for Martha. Even a brother would have been a blessing to the child, thought this sisterless, brotherless woman. Two months ago she would have been glad to bear Bob a son, gladder than ever before, now that she had an income, now that Bob was almost making a living in the garage. Hadn't he always maintained unashamedly that Martha ought to have been a boy? But now—it didn't seem possible that such a thing should have happened to her. It was the very climax of horror. If she bore a son, he would be the son of a thief! It didn't seem possible that she, Emily Fiske, could be shut up in a marriage, a trap, such as that. Oh, what a good thing it was that Mrs. Kenworthy hadn't lived to know of her son's shame. Would she, Emily Kenworthy, be alive when her son's crookedness displayed itself? She felt she would go mad with resentment. And yet she ought to be calm. How could a woman in such a trap be calm?

Such was the rage of her mind when she heard of Jim Kenworthy's divorce.

She had seen him only once, for a little while, in the year and a half since his mother's death. He had had then to pay Bob a visit, to settle a matter connected with the closing up of his mother's estate. Emily had thought he looked ill, then, and he had confessed he wasn't well. He had seemed unusually shy with her, and distant, and she had wondered, if now, since his

mother wasn't there, to bring them together on a sure basis, he wanted to avoid her; for he had seemed—well, almost afraid of her that day. The August morning the news of his divorce came, she had pulled herself out of bed before noon, determined to control herself, determined not to give way to her feelings. She had taken a chair, and, not yet dressed, had sat down by a fine old chest of drawers in the bottom drawer of which Martha's baby clothes were now stored. Not very fine little garments had Martha's first ones been. But every thought of that dear babyhood, of her own innocent joy in it, made the pain of Bob's perfidy the more acute. Little outgrown skirts and things. Suddenly it came to her that Bob might have wanted money to buy her just things like those. He had been very poor then, and ashamed of his poverty before her. And she had been extravagant, a poor manager. But that was no excuse, none at all. If he had told her frankly that he had no money, she would have wrapped her baby happily in an honest old towel, she cried to herself, tears springing afresh to her eyes. She might have spent money foolishly, but Bob could never say that, having married a poor man, she had complained to him of his poverty. She had never done that, at least. She wiped the tears from her eyes. She couldn't understand how it was that tears came so easily now. She had never been a crying woman. She sat perfectly still on her low chair. She wouldn't even let her hands cover her face. That seemed to encourage tears. She kept her lips closed tight and avoided looking at the yellow little bits of flannel in her lap. She looked out on to the lawn, to the tiger lilies. She tried to concentrate her mind on her garden. She had never moved those phlox. As soon as it was cool, that evening, she would go out and cut the heads off all the magenta ones.

She heard Bob come into the house. He seldom came home at that hour. He called up to her, and she didn't answer. She heard him questioning the old maid-of-all-work. She heard him running up the stairs.

"Emily!" he cried. "Where are you? I got something to tell you!"

He burst into her room. There was a letter in his hand and his hat was on his head. He was so out of breath he could scarcely speak.

"What d'you think!" he stammered. "From Jim. Jim's wife's left him! She's *leaving* him, Emily! She's getting a divorce!"

"Jim's wife!"

"Yeah! She's leaving him. She's getting a divorce! DIVORCE!" he cried, as if he were trying to realize the incredibility of such a thing.

"Let me see!"

He held the letter.

"Damn that woman!" he cried. "Leaving him! What's going to become of him now? Tell me that! Who's going to look after him? And the boy! Getting a divorce, damn her!"

"Well, she can get a divorce if she wants to, can't she!" Emily cried back to him. "You needn't talk that way. Let me see the letter!"

He handed it to her, not answering her extraordinary outbreak. He stood sputtering. Emily saw the words Jim had written—the honest Jim she ought to have married. He hadn't had the heart to write them before, he said, and he wasn't writing anyone else yet, although it would be public in a few days. His wife had simply told him, when he got home the last time, that she was living with another man and

he could get a divorce on that ground, or, if he preferred, she would sue for non-support. He didn't want to divorce her, for the boy's sake. He hadn't felt he could take the boy away from her altogether. After all, she had borne him. They would settle that out of court, he hoped, amiably. He had known vaguely for a long time that a separation was inevitable, but he hadn't foreseen it coming in quite such a way. It was a shock.

She read that, and hid her face in her hands, to save herself from those blinding words. Jim was free! Her gentle, honest, beautiful lover was free! She was going to be free. He was tired and ill and badly used, and she was going to him. She was going to get away from this man who befouled the name he had given her. She was so sure of it, so shaken by the hope of it, that she began to weep wildly. She dimly heard Bob tramping about in his excitement, sputtering.

"Been living with another man, has she? With Jim away trying to get a little rest, trying to get his health back there alone! I knew she was like that! I could tell it, the damned slimy little viper! What's he going to do now, Emily? What's he going to do now? Sick, he is, and he lets himself be kicked out this way! This'll kill him! He'll never get over this. He ain't a man to stand this. She might as well have poisoned him, in his condition! And he lets her start suit! He lets her have the boy! He must be crazy! I'll wire him! A nice woman to give the boy to! He's too damned sentimental! He's too good to live! Damned old fool! Why don't he take the kid away from her? Why don't he stand up for himself? Why don't he let the boy know what she is? Covering everything up this way! He's lost his head! Don't you cry, Emily!"

It never occurred to him that she was crying over anything

but Jim's hard luck. He came and stood close to her. She sat bending down, by that opened drawer. In his excitement he saw what it contained. His mind, stirred beyond its usual wont, seized upon the significance of her occupation. She felt him stand stockstill for a second above her.

"My God! Emily!" he cried. "Is *that* what's the matter of you? Is *that* it?"

She couldn't speak to him. She was full of riotous treachery against him even as he asked her that question.

"I didn't know it, Emily. My God! Why didn't you tell me?"

She hated his oaths, and he knew it.

"Don't!" she sobbed. He thought she had protested again against his use of that word.

"No, I won't!" he answered, eagerly. He got down beside her and got his arm around her. She couldn't stop crying. He burst out again:

"My God! Maybe it'll be a boy this time!"

She wanted to get rid of him.

"Don't!" she cried.

"No, I won't, Emily! I didn't know what was the matter of you. I was worried about you. You weren't yourself! Can't I get you something? Shall I get the hot-water bag?"

She was furiously angry with him. That outrageous suggestion was so like him. Fortunately, she was crying too brokenly to say what was in her mind.

"Maybe it'll be a boy!" he repeated, humbly, helplessly, standing over her. "Don't you cry! Think of that, Emily!"

She only knew that for the first time she hated this man, and Jim was free.

"Damn that woman!" he burst out again. "Poor old Jim! I forgot about Jim, nearly! By God! it isn't fair! This for me

and that for him, all in one day! If I'd been there, I'd of killed that woman! Yes, I would! I'd have published it from the Atlantic to the Pacific! Don't cry, Emily! We can't do anything about it! We can't help him! Don't you want to lie down? I've a notion to go to New York to see Jim! Who's there to help him but us?"

She found her voice at last.

"Go on!" she sputtered.

"No. I can't go now. I can't go—till I see how you are, Emily. You're too bad. Have you been to the doctor? What you so sick for, this time? Jim's never had a chance, with that woman. I always knew they weren't happy. Not like we've been. The rotten little skunk!"

Bob walked about her room till lunch was ready, breathing out his fury against that woman, and his pity for Jim, exclaiming over his own prospective good fortune. Emily lay crying wretchedly, because Jim was free, and she was going to be free, and in her condition she couldn't go to him.

In the excited hours which followed, Emily in her room tried to adjust her future to its great possibilities. Eventually both Jim and she would be free, and then nothing in the world could keep them always apart. They had both learned their lesson. They knew each other. Jim was the most lovable, the most admirable man, by far, she had ever known. Hadn't she seen him, how true he was, how gentle, those painful days when his mother was ill? Oh, how could it have been that, for a little childish fit of anger, she hadn't married him in the first place? And now—she might have a son. And she knew Bob would never for a minute give up any right of his to that child. Jim would do that sort of thing. He had a sort of understanding chivalry for women. He would give his own son to the

mother that bore him if it killed him. But she couldn't expect any such mercy ever from Bob. She knew that. And moreover, if she got her freedom and went to Jim now—having been his brother's wife, however good a reason she had for not continuing his wife—would Jim—receive her? Jim had no such a passion for Bob as Bob had for Jim. She had always known that Bob loved Jim strangely. Why, Bob, since he had got the news of Jim's trouble, had hardly been himself an hour. Jim wouldn't have been so—concerned with a misfortune of Bob's—not in the same way. But still, Jim was an honest man—of strange, fine scruples, of a far more delicate sense of rightness than Bob. Would he accept a woman who had been his brother's? He would have been a better father to Martha than Bob had ever been. Now, as a stepfather, with a deserted father some place in the veiled background, Martha and Uncle Jim—Oh, how horrible it all was! Why couldn't she have married Jim in the first place! Why had Bob ever come between them?

Chapter Seven

Bob came back from New York and kissed her, raging.

"Where do you suppose I found him, Emily?" he began. "Where do you suppose Jim was? In a hospital! Ye-ah! In a hospital! Said he didn't want to stay in her house, and he was too sick to go to a hotel. Looks bad, Emily. He hasn't any pep. Said he got home from Texas in the evening, and she was out. He saw the boy, and went to bed. She came in, in the morning, when he was trying to shave. He was all worn out with the trip, knocking around on trains so much. She came in and told him, the dirty little skunk! All ready to go out, she was. She had a veil on. A veil on her nose. I said, 'Lucky for you to use a safety razor.' Jim didn't get me. He didn't know what I meant at first. He's too good to live on this earth, Jim is. If she'd been mine, I'd of killed her! Said he packed up and left. It was *her* house! Damn her money! Said what was worrying him was the boy. He's had to be away from him so much, the last couple of years, out here and in Texas. And it wasn't as if the kid was an ordinary kid, he said. Jim's always read with him. Jim's taken care of him. She never spent an hour reading to him, you can bet your bottom dollar. Says the kid's eyes are better than they used to be, but not right. She says Jim can see him whenever he wants to. As soon as the divorce is through, she's going to marry the other fellow. She might have waited till Jim was a little better. This has knocked the life out of him. She might as well have poisoned him. My God! she might! Can you imagine Jim seeing his divorce in the papers?"

"Bob! Bob! Be quiet! Sit down and talk quietly! You mustn't get so excited. Tell me the truth. How do you know she had a veil on?"

"She would have. She's that kind of a dame! I asked him, and he said so. I tell you, Emily, I never thought I'd see Jim down and out like this! I knew the first time I set my eyes on her that she was a poisonous little snake! I'd as soon have married a sewer pipe! Suing him for non-support, and him losing all the health he ever had down in her God-damned oil wells! As if he didn't support her all right all those years she didn't have money! Lost half his practice taking care of stinking oil wells! He doesn't act natural, Emily. He's sick. He's blue. I never seen Jim blue before in my life!"

He frightened her into soberness of thought. She had forgotten there was such passion in lazy old Bob. She hadn't seen it since the days of their courtship. And, now, whether he was honest or a thief, she had to pity him. In the days that followed he actually didn't eat. He grew gloomy in spite of the pleasure he found in Emily's condition. He was a changed man. And this, Emily marveled to remember, was only Jim's divorce. What would he be like when he knew of her firm purpose to leave him—of his own divorce? She didn't know what she was going to do. Never before had she suffered from such a struggle of purposes, of hopes, and of desires. She could scarcely remember how it felt to sleep and wake peacefully, with no problems to rend her consciousness asunder. She spent whole nights sleeplessly.

One night she woke suddenly from a nap, and the quietness of her home was broken by a sound so unusual, so painful, she sat straight up in bed, listening.

The little sound came again, muffled. Her room was bright

with moonlight. She sprang out of bed and stood at her door, listening, hearing her heart beat. She stood there, straining her ears to make out what that sound was.

And then she realized that some one was crying—crying pitifully, in her happy house. She lost her fear in the surprise. She wondered if the maid had some hidden heartache. That was bitter pain she was listening to. She crept into the hall.

The sound came from Bob's room. She went instinctively to him. She saw him before he saw her. He was sitting on the edge of his bed, in his pajamas, sobbing.

"Why, Bob!" she exclaimed.

"Can't sleep," he said, apologetically. "Didn't mean to make a noise, Emily. Didn't mean to wake you up. I get to thinking about Jim, and I can't sleep! I tell you, Emily, when I was a kid Jim always fought for me! Licked all the big bullies for me! And I can't sleep for thinking of that hospital!"

And to her absolute consternation, he began again sobbing out loud, like a child. She had never seen a man cry. And now Bob, of all people, sitting there crying in the dark!

"Why, Bob!" she murmured, ashamed of herself. "Look here, Bob! You can't go on this way! It's not going to do Jim any good to have you taking on this way! You take it too hard! After all, other men's homes have been broken up. Other men have been divorced. Look at your mother. Wasn't she left a widow with two babies, after such a shock! And *she* went on living. *She* got through it! Jim'll get over this. You always said he wasn't happy with her, anyway. There are plenty of other women in the world. She isn't the only one for him. Lots of men are happier not married, anyway, Bob. Divorce isn't such a bad thing. Not for some people!"

"You talk like a damn fool! Emily, I didn't *mean* to say

that. I didn't mean that! But what you talking that way for, like you were crazy! What's a man going to do without a home? Tell me that! What's Jim going to do without that boy of his? You're crazy! What'd Jim want to marry again for, after such luck once?"

"I don't know what he's going to do! When he gets better, he'll—get on, all right. It's unfortunate, coming just now, when he isn't well. I grant you that. But he'll be better off without that woman, if he's been as unhappy as you say with her. He can have some sort of home—for the boy. She'll let him live some of the time with Jim, I suppose."

"Let him live with him, will she? By God! why should she *let* him live with Jim? Ain't he as much Jim's as he is hers? Yes, and a damned sight more! When's she ever spent any time on that boy! The moldy little shrimp!"

"Bob! Don't talk so excitedly! Jim'll get over this. He'll get along some way." In a perfect spurt of desperation she said to him: "Look here, Bob! Tell me the truth! Haven't you ever thought—haven't you ever wished—I mean—didn't you ever wish you'd married some one else—not me—that you could divorce me!"

He reached out for her and drew her to him, while she resisted hopelessly.

"Emily," he said, soothingly, "I got you all excited. I didn't mean to. I didn't think you would hear. You talk wild. I get to thinking about Jim and I just can't sleep. He's had a hell of a life. I didn't mean to wake you up. This would have been pretty hard on mother, I tell you. Now you go to bed. You're all excited."

She got up and went away from him. It was no use. He would never imagine she might be talking seriously. She didn't

know how she would ever make him understand her intentions. She couldn't imagine what he would be like when he finally was made to understand. She went back to her bed, thinking these things over, confused and shaken. She began to realize that she had Bob to deal with, as well as herself and Jim.

She tried to think what Mrs. Kenworthy would have done if she had lived to hear about Bob. Emily had been able to think only of the pain she would have suffered, the shock of disappointment. When that had passed, she began to wonder what that worthy course was which Mrs. Kenworthy would have found. *She* would have thought, first of all, of re-establishing Bob in uprightness. *She* would have said, "Honest or false, good or bad, he is still my son." That much was clear. And what would she have expected Emily to do? The best thing, of course, the highest possible achievement she would have expected of her daughter-in-law. That was like her. "Yes," said Emily, grimly, to herself, "she would have expected that, and she would have been disappointed." How hard it would have been, how much harder, to have left Bob if *she* had been there, to watch the separation with her gentle, undemanding eyes. But still, if Emily had left Bob—left him to cry silently through some night, a man with his life broken ruthlessly in two—would those eyes have been so gentle, so undemanding? "I'm giving him to you, Emily. You must understand that! His life depends on you, if you marry him!" She remembered the morning Mrs. Kenworthy had said that to her. Bob's mother had expected her to take care of Bob as if he was a baby. Well, she had done that! She had played the game as long as he had. And longer, too, in her ignorance. She wasn't breaking up Bob's home. He had broken it up himself, by his fundamental dishonesty. And, anyway, Mrs. Kenworthy was dead now.

Mrs. Kenworthy would never know what Emily Kenworthy did or refrained from doing. And yet, after that night when she found Bob weeping over the divorce that so distantly affected him, she never had the same assurance that what she had planned—her desertion of Bob in his disgrace—was exactly the right thing to do.

Every day from the time she heard of Jim's divorce until her baby was born, she thought over what Bob had done, what she was going to do, and what she might possibly do—if Jim still loved her. And every day she saw the lives of the three of them from a different angle; and generally Mrs. Kenworthy looked on, with more or less vagueness. Everything about her seemed to concern the relationships of the three. Her consciousness was so sore that whatever touched it hurt it. Each neighbor who dropped in to ask her how she was getting on seemed to begin to speak about the ethics of marriage. A woman who had lived in the town had married, after years of widowhood, the brother of her husband who had for years supported her children, his nieces and nephews. The town was divided in opinion. Some of the women were outraged by such a disgraceful alliance. Emily was only surprised that there was so much strong feeling about what seemed to her a natural marriage. She had never until then considered the degrees of relationship. The whole thing disgusted her. "And if anything about this is wrong, it is my living with Bob," she tried to tell herself. "I really belonged to Jim. And I deserted him for his brother." But even the disapproval of the neighbors to the marriage of the widow and her brother-in-law discouraged Emily. If there was some such scruple that the more fastidious people had, Jim would be sure to have it. Jim was so—sort of unusually noble. And Emily cried to herself:

"After all, that's all I want! All I want is to do the right thing myself. All I want is to keep my decency,—to get away from this thieving!"

Yet in her heart, she knew—she came to have to acknowledge —what Bob's mother would have said to her. "The wrong that Robert has done can never change your integrity, Emily. If he has failed in goodness, there is the more need of your being noble, for the child's sake. Your conduct now must exempt you forever from suspicion of complicity in Bob's wrong-doing. You've married Bob, and his life depends on you. A man isn't anything, Emily." And then Emily would turn away angrily from the remembrance of her mother-in-law. After all, that woman was dead! Couldn't she remember that? She would never know that her daughter-in-law had left one of her sons for the other. What nonsense, to put it that way! Hadn't she resolved to take Martha away from her rogue of a father before she had ever heard of Jim's freedom? It wasn't her fault that Jim was free! It was her fortune, an opportunity to be seized upon, at length—a Heaven-sent chance to undo what her silly girlish folly had done when she had quarreled with her real lover.

Late that fall the town was suddenly divided into two enemy camps, as small cities now and then are. Families that had lived peacefully side by side were erecting high fences between their back yards. Women's clubs' committees wouldn't meet to conduct business. Some families were talking of leaving town. The doctor's wife had been sent to a sanitarium. There was nothing else discussed but the bitter trial of the sons of some prominent families for cruelty to a cat. The charge was brought against them by an old maid who lived alone. She had suspected what was going on in that barn. She had got her neighbors to

hide with her, and watch, so that there could be no lack of witnesses. The doctor's wife went into hysterics during the trial. Her dear only little son wouldn't hurt a fly, and they were accusing him of such an unspeakable thing, making him the ringleader of a lot of depraved imps! The Scout master was there to say he didn't believe a word of the witness these respectable old ladies were giving. Did he suppose they were lying, then? Words like that couldn't be forgotten, ever. Was it true that the doctor had promised to pay any amount of damages if the case could be prevented from being tried? The Baptist minister would have to leave his congregation, daring as he did to preach about mercifulness, just then.

And even that seemed to bear directly on Emily Kenworthy's relationship to her husband.

It clung to her mind, this horrid thing. She was sorry for the doctor's wife. If a young woman broke down under a charge like this against a young boy, how could Mrs. Kenworthy have lived through the kind of revelation that might have come to her about her son? Likely she would have died from the shock. And that would have been too great a punishment even for Bob, Emily told herself. It was an ugly thing, but, after all, those children were young. "Young, are they?" exclaimed an indignant neighbor to whom Emily had said as much. "When a child is old enough to hurt a fly, he's old enough to know better!"

That woman had brought Emily a half of a great rich black chocolate cake, and it was like her to insist on Emily eating a bit of it. It did look like an unusually light cake. And Emily, against her judgment, ate a piece late in the evening. Probably it was that incidental cake that determined Bob Kenworthy's fate. Anyway, Emily dreamed a decisive dream that

night. That much is sure. She seldom dreamed. She often wondered afterward if it is possible that the whole course of a life, of three or four lives, of perhaps six or seven lives, could depend, in an orderly universe, on a small amount of grated chocolate mixed somewhat indigestibly into an otherwise wholesome bit of food.

It was three or four weeks after the night she had found Bob crying that she dreamed that she had seen those boys nailing that cat to the manger in that old barn. In her nightmare, she tried to call to them, tried to protest to them. But she couldn't scream. She couldn't get away. She had to stay still, hearing the cat. It was too sickening—that awful great long nail—and the blood. She couldn't even shut her eyes; she had to stand there, seeing it all.

She was sick when she came out of it. She cried in terror for Bob. She couldn't go back to bed until morning. She got a magazine, at length, and with all the lights turned on, she tried to read. It was a shocking thing.

And the worst of it was, it stayed with her for days. She saw that cat writhing, impaled, every time she tried to take a nap by day, when she tried to go to sleep by night, until she was beside herself. She didn't know how she was going to get it out of her mind. She went to the doctor for some medicine to make her sleep.

"I have such frightful nightmares," she told him. "I want to sleep so I won't dream."

"You haven't anything special to worry you, just now, have you?"

"No," she said.

How could she tell that man that the tortured cat was coming

to have a rather square face, a sort of human face—rather like Bob's?

The whole thing was perfectly outrageous. It wasn't fair. She didn't deserve it. Perhaps she *was* planning to—hurt Bob's feelings. But hadn't he hurt hers? Hadn't he wounded her most sorely, in the tenderest place of her consciousness? Of course he would be broken up when she told him she was going East for good. She was going quietly. She would tell no one else of her plans. Bob could go on living in her house. She wouldn't take action for some time. She had herself to consider, hadn't she, and Martha, as well as Bob? If he did such base things, he must expect to suffer for them, mustn't he?

But slowly, some way, her mood changed. She had to think of those boys. After all, if they *had* tortured that cat, they were only doing it for their own pleasure. They had to think of themselves sometimes, of their own pleasure, didn't they, as well as of the cat? If a woman could hurt a man for her own pleasure, to get something for herself, why shouldn't small boys hurt a cat? Humans did hurt one another for their own interests. There was no law against that. Boys might be arrested for driving a nail through a cat, but a woman couldn't be questioned for sending a sword through a man's affections. The boys' brutality shocked a whole city. Just to hurt a man, carefully, without scandal, alone in one's own house, that was so common that no one noticed, no one knew.

But she distrusted all her own reasons, all her conclusions, because they differed so from day to day. She turned from them in disgust. She was physically ill, and mentally sick, and utterly tired of the struggle going on within her. Her approaching confinement sobered her. Certainly she had not suffered anything like so much before the birth of Martha. She won-

dered if she was going to die. Sometimes she hoped she would. Sometimes she gave up all her radical plans. Sometimes she resigned herself loftily to a long martyrdom with her husband. Sometimes she told herself that it was all nonsense. She could never get an honest divorce from her husband. She hadn't any grounds. Bob had been poor. He had been dishonest. But in all the years she had lived with him he had scarcely spoken one ill-natured, one complaining word to her. He had always believed she was "all right." He had never criticized her for not managing as his mother knew how to manage. He had been utterly good-natured, until this summer, until this trouble of Jim's was making him moody. Yet she was planning to take from him his wife, his daughter, his brother. Sometimes she wept, and prayed, almost, to Mrs. Kenworthy, wanting to be good, whatever *that* was, wanting to satisfy her, wanting her blessing afresh upon her efforts. She had to think of Jim. It was impossible not to, with Bob sitting about worrying about him.

Every day Emily answered the morbid questions which confronted her resentfully—but with a growing conviction.

She gave birth to a son. For fourteen months that child lay gasping and dying. Her strong first baby had never wrung such love and pity from her as that wailing, choking, starving mite of a sufferer did. And Bob stood over her and his son, praying her to save him, praying to her as if she had been a god who could give life to the child she had made live. She forgot Jim. She forgot all her problems. The only question in the world for the two of them was whether the baby could lose another ounce and survive. She had never been so sorry for anyone, except that baby, as she was for Bob. She remembered how, when Martha as a baby had some slight dis-

turbance, Bob would laugh tolerantly at her anxiety. But now she pitied the fear in his voice, the terror of his eyes, as he stood by, asking helplessly: "You think he's better, don't you, Emily? Don't you think he looks better this morning?" He sat by the child in the Chicago hospitals. He hung over him, watching him breathe, whole nights at home, when specialists from the city were trying to find a suitable food for him. He sought out more doctors. He had bought a partnership in the garage with the money he had got from his mother and he was making money. He would have spent it all, he would verily have laid down his life, for that son. Emily understood that.

She hadn't seen Jim for months. Once when the baby seemed to be going to die, Bob had wired him to come. "It would do us good to see him, Emily," he had pleaded. "I feel as if I needed to see him."

But it didn't do them any good to see Jim. He came promptly. But something seemed to have gone out of him. "He hasn't any pep, Emily. He looks dead," Bob told his wife. Jim stayed a few days. He couldn't talk much about his own affairs. He was beginning suit to get possession of his son. He had scarcely seen the boy for months. His mother kept him at distances, inaccessible.

The evening Jim left for the East, Bob came back from the station and went to his baby's bed. Emily was there. The child was sleeping weakly. Bob stood meditating over the baby, as he often did. After a while he turned with a strong impulse away from the sight.

"By God, Emily!" he cried, under his breath. "Suppose the court gave Jim's boy to that woman! How can a court take a child away from a man? Jim'll die!"

Emily could have answered with conviction. "No, Jim wouldn't die. But *you* would. You would die, destroying us all, before you'd give that baby up!"

She said nothing. What was the use of saying anything? Bob couldn't be deserted. He couldn't be left. He never would stand it. She would have to share that baby with him, if she had any part in it.

But Robert Kenworthy, Junior, died. Bob had never shed a tear when his mother died. Yet he cried for hours bitterly the night that little white skeleton of a body lay in its coffin. There was no comfort in the world for him but in Emily. She said to herself, that night of grief, that if Bob had done wrong, he had paid a bitter penalty. She thought it might have been that if she hadn't had that shock at just the time she did, she might have had a normal pregnacy and a healthy, normal child. She couldn't say for sure, of course. She might have lost the baby, anyway, under the happiest circumstances. But surely that violent revulsion of feeling must have affected her physically. Bob would never know what his dishonesty had probably cost him. She could never now be cruel enough to tell him. That was out of the question. He was a haggard, bereaved, flabby middle-aged man now, whose hair was half gray, who had but one comfort in the world. And that comfort, that wife of his, had been purified by the fire of her pain. It wasn't her task to punish Bob for his wrong-doing. She had married him for better or for worse. She was unspeakably sorry for him.

So she renounced the lovely possibilities, compelled by what she was to choose the way of simple, kindly honor. She saw that it wasn't possible for her, whatever other women might do, to purchase the realization of her dream at the price of cruelty.

"The way of life is wonderful," she used to quote to herself. "It is by abandonment." But she quoted it ruefully. She bewailed, at times, the fact that she had so imperious a conscience; she resented the compulsions of her nature; not foreseeing that her worth was to give Jim a son and all the consolation that life held for him.

Chapter Eight

One evening of the summer of 1917 Emily sat on the screened veranda of her home, between Bob and Jim. (That was the year in which the life of the three of them was suddenly knit together, tied into knots, by the visit of Bronson.) She had on a smart soft white voile frock, and white silk stockings, and she dangled her white pumps carefully on her toes. She seemed in no way remarkable among women of her city, except possibly that she was more comely than most of them, and always better dressed. But she was one of the few living women who, having seen the commonplace worst of her universe, having had glimpses of a universe more adorable by far, had until almost that day opened-eyed and whole-heartedly, and with only a few occasional regrets, accepted her own. It was the rarity of the regrets which made her remarkable.

On the right of her sat the universe she had deliberately accepted, reading *The Motor Age*. Lying back in a chair so adjusted to the comfort of his heavy body that his feet were almost as high as his head, an electric fan whirling in surprising quietness behind him, her husband turned one page after another, oblivious of his companions. So Emily talked on and on to Jim, because she knew he wanted her to. Jim was smoking restlessly, excited by his keen anticipation of the morrow.

Jim had had hard luck. The suit for the custody of the boy two years before had been decided against him. He was to have his son for six weeks a year, in the summer, and the year

before, when the boy came to him, he had been too ill to take pleasure in him.

"He got on my nerves so, Bob, with his noise. I couldn't stand him. I wasn't well enough. I didn't—we didn't—get on, somehow. Not the way we used to. It was my fault, I suppose. He never annoyed me so much before. I couldn't stand his nonsense. When I was well, he seemed to me to be a good-enough sort of boy." Jim had acknowledged that, pitifully.

And Bob had responded: "It was rotten luck, damn her! I tell you what you do next summer, Jim. You bring the kid out to us. Emily'll take care of him if you're not up to much. We could be getting acquainted with him while you were resting. You bring him out home to us, and if you aren't all right by that time, we'll manage him for you!"

And when he got home, that time, from Chicago, where he had gone to meet Jim, who was passing through the city, he said to Emily:

"I told you this'd knock the life out of Jim! How's he to get better, worrying all the time about that boy? He's a sick man, Emily. By God! I never expected to see Jim down and out, as he is! He's yellow, and drawn. He looks dead. Blue! Hasn't earned a cent for eighteen months. I bet he's lost forty pounds. Well, I do. Forty pounds! You wouldn't know him! What could he do with a boy in a hotel, and him sick? No wonder he had a hell of a time with him. I told him to bring the boy out to us the next time he got hold of him. We could look after him, and you could take a little care of Jim. He needs some one to give him a little care. God damn that woman!"

Emily agreed readily enough. She was convinced that Jim

wouldn't accept Bob's invitation. She believed he had avoided her ever since his mother's death. But when he arrived, she thought she understood why he had come. He was reckless. He wanted to get hold of the boy again. He sought the place where he might some way see the boy without alienating him further by his ill health. He didn't care what happened, if only he could have that boy with him in peace, successfully.

Her pity for him that first week had made her literally sick. She had never imagined his misery could appeal so passionately to her. Bob hadn't exaggerated. Jim was shockingly unlike himself. He was weak. He couldn't eat. He couldn't sleep at night. He slept for a while every morning, and, being awake before noon, he would come down for lunch. The whole afternoon, if no one disturbed him, he would sit in a chair without speaking, slouching down wearily in his seat, looking straight ahead of him. Or he would rise and stand looking out of a window for an hour, with his hands in his pockets, and Emily, coming into the room, would be thrilled with pity because his shoulders showed such utter depression. She feared she would enter the living room and find him crying, sickeningly, as Bob had cried. She found almost at once that she could talk him out of the attitudes of despair. He wanted her to talk—to talk about anything—small-town gossip about the people they had known in their youth, chatter about Martha, anything, to save him from his own thoughts. And sometimes as she talked to him she became conscious that he wasn't listening to her. He was thinking about her, and his own life, estimating her, admiring her, regretting the incredible fate that had kept them apart. He was dreaming about her. He didn't know he was looking at her that way. When he looked at her absently, gloomily, that way, she was afraid of herself—she

wished the boy was already there. Martha, however, did as well. Martha served as a barrier between them. Jim seemed more like himself when he played with that child than at any other time. He talked to her more than he did to her father and mother both. He smiled when he talked to her —that endearing old smile that he used with his mother. Once it brought tears to Emily's eyes, which she hurried to hide from him. Jim didn't want pity. She understood that, too. Bob hovered around him as if he were a sick baby, in a humoring, elephantine, awkward way that Emily could see annoyed him. And when she chattered away to him (it was so easy to talk to Jim, especially about Martha, easy to tell him all the theories about her education and her future which Bob smiled tolerantly over)—when they sat visiting together, Emily heard little ripples of tenderness come irrepressibly to the surface of her voice and disappear again as quickly as the little ripples disappeared from the river at the end of her garden. And Jim didn't resent them. She felt that.

She wondered if the river made Jim think of the days of their—well, their youthful romance. She wondered what he was thinking of when he stood for an hour at a time under the old willow, where he had first kissed her. If he had been thinking of that, would he have had the very pose of dejection, she had wondered, more than once, watching him guiltily from her bedroom window. Or was it because he was thinking of that, of what they both had missed, that he was so blue? The first morning that he had come downstairs, this summer, he had come into that very living room where they had quarreled. He had been standing by that very table where that book had been lying. He had said:

"Seems mighty good to see you here again, Emily." And

then he had grown red, and hastened to add, "I mean, good to have you living in your home, in your own sort of a setting."

Now why, she asked herself repeatedly, had he been confused about so simple a thing? Of course he was nervous and under a great emotional strain. His very weakness compelled her to give him the benefit of every doubt, to think honorably of him, as he deserved to be thought of.

The nearer came the day on which the boy was to arrive, the more restless Jim grew. He scarcely spoke of himself or of his son, but even Bob saw how intensely he was anticipating the event. That last evening as they awaited him he was not able to sit still on the veranda. He got up and strolled down the path to the river again and again. Bob had taken him for a drive earlier in the evening. He hadn't slept all day, nor the night before.

And now he was sitting by Emily, well away from the light of Bob's reading lamp and the noiseless whirling fan, a shadow of Bob, a stranger might have remarked. The subtle resemblance between the brothers had teased Emily at times ever since she first knew them. Jim's head was like Bob's, exactly. And yet, it was narrower, more shapely, and longer. His face was like his brother's, altogether, at times. But it was a thinner, finer, more sensitive face, all lined now and wasted by his capacity for discriminations and sufferings and delicacies, and still, after all, just like Bob's old solid, square, blunt male face. His body was like Bob's, entirely, and yet more slender, just now distressingly slender and thin, and he moved with a grace which Bob's heaviness essentially lacked. And then Jim was neat. He was naturally, unconsciously, and incorrigibly neat. He sat there in his shirt sleeves—it was an extremely sultry night—and his shirt was perfectly fresh, unwrinkled, almost a

dainty shirt, Emily thought, and, most important of all, it was a shirt of correct and decent pattern. Bob had broken forth again into violent stripes. Emily had long ago given up trying to influence his taste in percales. He just would do things like that, when he bought new garments. Besides, he sat slouchily, heavily, so that, though his shirt was a perfectly clean shirt, it never could look absolutely clean. Bob's shirts couldn't, some way, even when he left his garage garments away downtown in the garage. And Bob, though he shaved every morning—when Jim was there—by evening had a blue beard that looked unshaven by Jim's blonder smooth face. Emily some way never seemed to notice his roughness so much as when Jim was present. And Bob read on, and Jim listened to the woman. And it never entered the heads of either of the brothers that the contrast between their shirts was a thing which gave Emily's acceptance of her universe an element of the high and heroic.

And yet more even than the pattern of the shirting, the hands of the brothers denied their kinship. Jim's hands appeared to have been made for turning the pages of choice books. Bob's hands were obviously made for cleaning carburetors, and obviously accustomed to that work. Emily herself by this time knew most of the best books written in her language. Her hands had, as it were, an affinity for Jim's. To Bob's they were essentially indifferent, if not antipathetic. And she never could understand exactly the difference between a spark plug and a windshield. And why wheels go round under a car she doesn't know yet—though once she looked up the subject unsatisfactorily in the encyclopædia.

"Mrs. Grey was telling me to-day what a lot of fun her boys are having with guinea pigs, Jim. Their father is trying to teach them the Mendelian law early. He is showing them how

to establish a certain strain—of color, or something, she said. She said she'd be glad to let me have some for Bronson, if he would be interested in them. Do you think he'd like them? Does he like animals? Pets?"

And then she went on, without giving him time to answer, because she realized, annoyed with herself, that Jim really didn't know what his son liked, nowadays. She hurried on.

"He could build a little pen for them between the strawberries and the asparagus. There's a little place he could have for them there. I guess all boys like to build pens, don't they?"

"Bronson does. That's sure. He liked to pound things when he was just a baby. He's always playing around with tools. I don't know, Emily. The boy's bound to make a lot of noise, I'm afraid. Maybe you'll . . . "

She understood what he hesitated to say.

"Oh, Jim! I should hope he *would* make a little noise! I wouldn't want a little boy just to sit around as still as a chair! There's plenty of room for them to play in the yard, anyway. You needn't think it will *bother* me. I was thinking to-day of those little Grant boys. Of course they're a bit younger than he is, but they're such polite children. They really have good manners. I thought we could have a little picnic up the river with them, and a friend or two of Martha's, so he could get acquainted with them. I must say there are some boys on this street I wouldn't like to have him play with. We can thank our lucky stars that Mrs. Phelan has taken those imps of hers to the lake for the summer. I simply would not have had those boys coming here to play with him. They're awful! They simply squawk, Jim. They're always yelling at some one across the street, and their voices are the limit. I shouldn't have liked to say to their mother that I wouldn't have Bronson playing

with them. And I would have had to, if they had been home. It seems providential."

Jim lit another cigarette.

"Of course you know, Emily—Bronson's not much of a saint himself. He's a handful. I told you that. He was always a hard child to manage. He has a will of his own, and a temper. I warned you."

"I know that! You remember the night you took us up to his nursery when he was about four? Wasn't he a dear, then, though! He was a perfectly adorable baby! You remember he was determined to get the window shut alone. You offered to help him. I still remember the look he gave you. Bob roared at him. The funny thing was he *did* get it shut himself. Do you remember that, Jim?"

"Of course."

Such a simple answer that was. And yet Emily had to reprove herself for the thought that came into her mind. Why should she suppose that Jim wanted to say, "Of course. I remember every time all these years I ever saw you!" She ought to be ashamed of herself. She said:

"The dear little fellow!"

"He's not little, Emily. He's a very large boy for his age. I was surprised to see how tall he's getting."

"Yes, I suppose so. He's fourteen, after all. Why, it's after nine! I must call Martha." Emily started to rise, and sat down again. "I must tell you what she said to-day, Jim. She said she didn't believe you'd ever learn to play flinch. She says she tries as hard as she can to let you win, but no matter how badly she plays you always play worse. She's afraid she'll hurt your feelings, always winning. You have such tender

feeling, she said. So you must buck up and beat her to-morrow, or the next time you play!"

Jim almost chuckled.

"I'm glad some one—" Emily was sure he had begun to say, "some one is so solicitous about my feelings." However, he merely said: "I'm glad some one is so interested in my education. She didn't think I understood what she was trying to do! I'll fix her, next time."

Emily called her daughter, and the child came slowly from the starlight of the garden into the light of the porch. She was bringing with her for their inspection a firefly she had caught in a large glass fruit jar. Through the thinness of her white garments the outlines of her childish body showed beautifully. Martha Kenworthy, as her mother often exulted privately—or to her uncle Jim—was like no one she might have been expected to resemble. She was a hitherto untried combination of family strains, a most gratifying fusing of inheritable personalities. She had gray eyes like her mother's, and a certain neatness of individuality and beauty of movement, like her uncle Jim's. Her bobbed hair was black like her father's and straight like his, but extremely soft and fine, so that it was small wonder that Jim's hand went naturally up to stroke it as she came and stood cuddled against him. She was a grave child, and she had a way of going about with her eyes shining to herself, and her little mouth puckered up for a chuckle, as if she knew some fine new joke which she wasn't going to tell. And when she sat down, she sat down neatly and gravely, with her hands folded almost shyly, seeming to enjoy herself. Emily was sure no little girl ever sat down and folded her hands with such distinction, as her daughter did.

And even when Emily's mind had been sorest against her

husband, in the months before her boy was born, she had had to acknowledge to herself that he had given her a rare child in Martha. Others of her friends had married more wisely from a worldly point of view. But what marriage had produced a child equal to hers? Bob Kenworthy might be unable to earn a living. He might be dishonest. But look at the breeding of his daughter—her lovely, quiet distinction! Everybody acknowledged it.

Emily that night was firm in her purpose. Firefly or no firefly, it was Martha's bedtime. She had been allowed to sit up so late only because she had slept away most of the afternoon. She wasn't to stand there using her uncle's interest in the little imprisoned flashes to screen her wicked purpose of loitering on the porch. So she moved slowly toward her father, to kiss him good night, as was her custom. And according to his, he kissed her briefly, almost without taking his eyes from the line he was reading. And when she went back to Jim he gave her a long postponing hug.

"I'll tell you one thing, Miss Martha," he began. "I'm going to learn to play flinch. I'm getting serious about it! Your mother said she would coach me. It's too bad for you to have to play with an old dunce like me!"

She protested fondly.

"Oh, Uncle Jim! You aren't a dunce, exactly. You're bright enough about most things. Mother can show you a lot about it. It's funny she don't like to play, isn't it?" Martha had a further idea. "You'd better practice with me a lot just now so you can beat Bronson. You wouldn't want him to beat you, would you? It would look kind of funny for a boy to beat his own father. Mother, can't I show Uncle Jim how to play better? Can't we play now?"

"No, you can't, Martha. You're to go to bed."

She took a step toward the undesired door.

"Do you think Bronson plays, Uncle Jim?"

"Well, if he doesn't know how, we'll teach him. He'll have to play. You and I will play against him and your mother, Martha. We'll beat them all hollow. I play a fine game when I have a partner."

"Do you?" Martha seemed unconvinced.

"Of course I do. It's moral support I need, really, in flinch."

"Jim, stop it! Martha, go along upstairs."

"Yes, mother. Mother, what time does Bronson have to go to bed in the summer? . . . He doesn't have to go to bed so early as this hot nights, *does* he, Uncle Jim?"

"He's two years older than you, Martha." Emily was uncertain when the boy would go to bed. She hoped he wouldn't make any trouble about going. She had a vague idea boys were harder to get to bed early than girls, even.

"It just seems as if to-morrow would never come, doesn't it, mother?" Martha was still hopeful.

"The sooner you get to sleep, the sooner it will be here."

"But I don't know whether I can sleep to-night or not, mother. I'm so excited about Bronson. I was thinking—"

"Martha, you little wretch! Off you go!"

"I was just thinking, mother—"

"Stop it! It's too late to think."

"I was wondering if Bronson would like to play—"

"Good night, Martha!" Emily's voice was persuasive. Martha sighed, and said good night, and went slowly up the stairs.

Jim got up and went into the house for a drink. Emily heard Martha singing to herself as she undressed. And it occurred to her poignantly that she had done well to decide to

stay on with Bob. Her family wasn't broken up. She was there, with her child safe, and some place Jim's wife, his former wife, would be sending her son away to his father, to live for six weeks under circumstances she could in no wise control, of which, probably, she didn't approve. What a hard thing that must be, now! She tried to imagine herself in such a situation, divorced, and deprived of power to protect that daughter of hers, for even a few weeks. She wondered how she could ever have planned such a thing. She hadn't been well at the time. She hadn't been herself. . . .

Jim came out and sat down, and smoked one cigarette after another as she chattered on, for his diversion, about her plans for the little boy. After a while Bob arrived suddenly, with a long-distance jump, as it were, into the middle of their conversation.

"They're asking thirty-five hundred now for Trotters! It would be a long time before they'd sell me one at that price, I'll tell you!"

A rather blinking silence often followed Bob's arrival.

"Is that that sporty-looking car Phillips drives?" Jim asked, politely.

"Ye-ah! A lot of tin! Dolled up junk, I'll tell the world! I bet my bottom dollar he never paid thirty-five hundred for it. Couldn't mortgage his house for half that! Not by a long shot!" And Bob reverted to his mechanical distances. They heard nothing more from him for half an hour.

By that time he had read through even the tire ads in his magazine; he threw it down, turned off his reading lamp, pulled himself out of his chair with a yawn, and came over and stood in front of his brother, stretching.

"Well, to-morrow night by this time the boy'll be here, Jim!"

he announced, cordially. "You ought to go to bed and get some sleep." He lit a cigar for a last smoke. "You want the hose turned off the pokers, Emily?"

By far the most interesting blossom to Bob, of all those in his wife's garden, was the garden-hose standard which he had made for her. It was so cunningly devised that it could almost. but not quite, water the flowers itself. Bob was especially tolerant of gladioli—pokers, he nicknamed them, because Emily had some fine ones she was always wanting watered, and they gave his pet a lot of usefulness. Emily couldn't help smiling to see Bob adjusting his toy evening by evening. "If only Martha had a carburetor in her lungs and an insulator in her liver, how Bob would delight in her!" she said to herself.

"These here things next to them are all wilted. Shan't I water them awhile?" called Bob from the starlight. She knew he would water them as long as his cigar lasted.

"Thank you," she said, not ironically. She didn't criticize Bob. She accepted him.

Jim left her and joined Bob in the yard. She went upstairs, leaving them together. Later, when Bob came up, he came to her room.

"I wish Jim'd let me go to Chi after the kid. It's too hard for him. He'll come back wilted. I could go and get him just as well!"

"I know it, Bob. I offered to go, too. But I can understand that he'd rather go himself. He wants to see him first himself. To get acquainted with him again before he has to get acquainted with us. The train will be terribly hot and dusty. I wish we'd have rain!"

"Damn that woman!" said Bob.

Chapter Nine

EMILY never forgot the afternoon Jim came back with his son. She and Bob and Martha were standing on the platform when the train roared in, through its whirlwind of hot, gritty dust. She saw the porter descend from the Pullman end of the train. She saw Jim following him. He had looked ill enough in the morning, when he left. But now he was ghastly. It wasn't the dust of the journey, she realized, in a flash; it wasn't the thinness of his face; it was chagrin. She looked from him instantly to the steps of the car, for the boy, who didn't appear. Jim had greeted them confusedly and started to pick up his bags, which the porter had set down. No one else got off. The porter cried to Jim: "Where's the young man? Ain't he gettin' off here?" And at Jim's nod, he jumped up the steps to call him.

Emily heard some one call savagely, "Get out of my way, can't you!"

Then there appeared on the steps the most appalling young human cyclone she had ever seen,—a storm both terrible and imminent. He was shockingly tall—he looked six feet. He had on a suit of gray knickers, and a soft white shirt, with its collar turned defiantly up around his ears. Above that overgrown lanky body she saw a blond head, a childish face, wearing thick-lensed glasses—a face of such insolence and rage that she couldn't for a second move toward it.

She had thought, of course, that she would kiss the little fellow. She recovered and went toward him. She stretched out her hand to him, hearing Jim's confused introduction. And she

saw him deliberately put his hand behind his back. She felt Martha drawing close against her, to avoid the menace of him. She felt Bob staring at him open-mouthed. She knew they were all drawing away from him, leaving him standing alone, for a second, in the circle his contempt made about him. She heard Jim ask needlessly, "Where's the car?" Bob recovered, took the bags from Jim, and they started, bewildered, toward the street.

Martha had said to Jim the day before:

"If you have him all to yourself on the train, don't you think he could sit between mother and I on the way up from the depot, Uncle Jim?" She had arranged that.

But all plans had faded away quietly, instantly. That boy, that person, jumped into the seat with Bob, who was driving, and the other three helplessly took the back seat.

"I never would have known him, Jim! How tall he is!"

She was determined not to seem to see his humiliation. She tried to talk carelessly. But shocked thoughts were rioting through her mind. "Can that be Bronson! *Can* that be Jim's boy! Oh, my goodness! what an awful-looking boy! No wonder he looks sick!"

"How'd you know him, Uncle Jim?" Martha asked, awed.

"Oh, I saw him last year! But I was surprised. I didn't know a child could grow that much in twelve months, myself!"

They got to the house almost at once. Emily heard him ask Bob incredulously, "This place?"

But Bob didn't deign to answer that tone. They had all got out of the car. Jim made to take the bags and Bob took them from him, and he made a mistake.

"You take that!" he said to Bronson, indicating the smaller bag.

The boy looked insolently at him. "Do you think I'm a servant?" he asked.

Bob grabbed the bag, realizing that Jim heard that answer. They went into the house, Bob and Emily, conscious each of the other's determination to shield Jim from this shame of his. As soon as he was in the hall, the boy stopped and peered suspiciously about him, through his thick lenses, at the rugs, the walls, the table. Then he went and stuck his head into the living room, as if he was inspecting some disgusting little hotel which he must for a time put up with.

Jim had sunk down into a chair in the living room. Emily said:

"Bob, you show him his room. I want to get Jim some milk. He needs something to eat."

It was almost supper time. Jim wouldn't eat, then, so soon before his usual time. But she must get him away from that boy. She went to the kitchen, and came back with the milk. She detained Jim. He sat sipping his milk.

"Such a hot day in Chicago. I didn't get a good lunch, either. It didn't seem fit to eat. You didn't have any rain? I saw a storm from the train. I hoped you were getting it, Emily."

"Wouldn't you like to have a bath, and your supper in bed, Jim? It must have been very tiresome."

"Oh no, Emily, thank you. I ought to—I think I'll have supper at the table—with you all," he said, nervously. "I suppose I have time for a bath, haven't I?"

Emily was trying to hear what was going on upstairs between the boy and Bob. It seemed quiet up there. She judged Jim could gain his room in peace.

She went up the stairs to her room. She heard Bob speaking

to Jim. He came in presently, and, shutting the door carefully, he sank into a chair.

"My God!" he said.

For once Emily agreed with that ejaculation.

"Where is he?" she asked, in a whisper.

"I left him in his room. We're in for it now, Emily! He asked me where his bath was, and I said he'd share his father's. And he said, 'What do you take me for? Clear those things out of here!' Did you see Jim's face when he got off the train?"

"I should say I did. Why, Bob, it doesn't seem possible that that's Jim's boy! I can't understand it."

"Damn that woman! If he'd been with Jim he'd of been different. Hasn't Jim had enough hard luck without this, Emily? The size of that kid! The nerve of him! What we going to do now?"

"We— I don't know! We'll just have to put up with him awhile. I suppose he didn't want to come out here. I suppose they've got all his sympathy on his mother's side. I never saw anything equal to him. He makes me feel like a worm! I suppose he's used to all the luxuries there are. Likely he has a bath of his own. Marble palaces, and everything, likely, he's used to."

"Damn her money! I don't know what he's used to, but I'll take some of the—impudence out of him before long. Jim's just knocked flat by him! He doesn't seem to have good sense!"

"I suppose we're just sort of poor relations to him, Bob. And strangers. Perhaps he's shy."

"Shy! Huh! I'll tell the world he ain't shy, whatever's the matter with him! Good Lord!"

"Now, Bob, be careful at supper. We mustn't seem to notice his—bad manners yet. We must try to do something!"

"Do something! That's all I want. To do something. What in hell'll we do!"

Martha came in. "Mother," she said, gravely, "this is a funny thing."

"Why?"

"Mother, I think there's been a mistake some place. I bet Uncle Jim's got the wrong boy. How could that be my cousin? You said he was a little boy!"

"My dear, I fear—I don't think there's been any mistake. He's just grown up suddenly into a big boy."

"But, mother, if he was Uncle Jim's boy, how could he look so? He's so cross! He's horrid!"

"Well, Martha, you mustn't let Uncle Jim hear you say that. He *is* Uncle Jim's boy, and he'd like us to like him. I—think he's rather shy, you know. He'll look more pleasant to-morrow, I think."

They gathered about the supper table apprehensively. The boy wasn't there. Bob said he had seen him going out into the garden. Emily hesitated. Bob had told him supper was ready.

"I don't suppose he'd like us to wait for him," she said, calmly. They went on with their meal, with their eyes and their ears toward the porch through which he must enter.

He came lunging in, presently, peering at them defiantly with his hard, magnified gaze. He took his place next to Emily suspiciously, and picked up his plate and looked closely at it. He allowed himself to be helped to food, and then he tasted it, as if he expected to be poisoned, and gave up the attempt to eat it. Kate, the old lame maid, came in presently, and he turned right about in his chair, and inspected her till she left the room, with a reinforced and impertinent inspection. Emily went talking on, not noticing his manner. He got deliberately up and went

over and shut off the fan to inspect it. Then he turned it on, at each degree of speed, turned it off again, and adjusted it so all the breeze would fall to him, turned it on, and sat down. The dessert came in.

He peered at it suspiciously. "What's this?" he demanded.

Emily turned sweetly toward him. "That, my dear, is a George Washington pie."

He seemed taken back. "What'd you say?" he repeated.

"That's a George Washington pie."

He had recovered. "Funniest-looking pie I ever saw!" he scoffed. And then, having got the attention of the table to himself, he lifted a forkful and smelled it.

Emily was stone blind to the gesture. "That's the point," she said, gently. "It *is* a funny pie. In fact, it's really a cake. But everyone calls it pie."

"Huh!"

"And when your father and your uncle were little boys their mother always used to make it for them for a treat. Your grandmother always used to make it for your father when he came out to see her, after he was a grown man. So I thought we'd have it for you to-night."

"Haven't you got any ice-cream?"

"I'm sorry to say we haven't any, this evening. We generally *do* have it. I think, myself, ices are the best dessert a night like this."

He had scarcely eaten a bite. Emily couldn't bear to look at Jim's face. She talked heroically on. She thought, "The more intolerable he is, the nicer I'm going to be with him, for Jim's sake." And as she was resolving so creditably to herself, she was aware that the boy had taken from his pocket the longest black cigar she had ever seen. And he was scratching a

match. He was scratching it on the Chippendale chair! She sat silenced by the size of the cigar and the hardness of the childish face it protruded from. She heard Jim say, sharply:

"You can't smoke here! Your aunt doesn't like it!"

She heard the boy's scornful challenge, "Can't I?" He blew smoke across the table in front of him, looking deliberately at Jim.

It was a horrid second of crisis. Suppose that awful person defied Jim, right there, before them all—poor old sick Jim.

She leaned quickly toward him,

"Don't you pay any attention to those men, Bronson," she said, with a motion indicating Jim and Bob. "I don't let *them* smoke in here, to be sure. But *they* aren't my nephews. I always intended letting *you* smoke here, because you're the only nephew I've got in the world! I always mean to let you smoke in the dining room"—she consulted her wrist watch airily—"at seven o'clock in the evening, when you come to visit me!"

She continued to lean coaxingly toward him, her eyes shining, her cheeks flushed pink with the suppressed excitement of saving Jim. The boy took the cigar from his mouth and sat stockstill, bending toward her, peering toward her through his disfiguring glasses, as if he were trying to get a close view of something amazing on which he couldn't focus his eyes. He seemed utterly astounded. He continued to stare, suspiciously, incredulously. And Emily, gathering up all her courage, deliberately smiled at him. Nothing happened, and she grew more brave. She reached out her hand and patted him affectionately on his arm.

"It's so nice to have you here, Bronson," she said.

The boy's nerve failed him. He sat staring speechlessly. She looked for a second at Jim. And the expression of his face

was one to dream about—a sort of helpless, hopeless tenderness and love on his face for her—admiration. But Bob was laughing. Bob was roaring with laughter. She looked to see what had happened. He was laughing at Martha.

Martha was indeed a sight. She was sitting bolt upright in her chair, staring at the boy as he continued to stare at her mother. Her little mouth was screwed into such a horrified Puritan disapproval of her cousin that even Emily had to smile. She was too busy, however, wondering what was going to happen next, to smile long. She was turning again to Jim's boy, when Bob got abruptly up.

"Come on," he said. "We'll go and smoke on the porch."

Jim seemed eager to get away from the table. They all rose and went out. Bronson went out of the porch, and around the house, in the direction of the street, and disappeared.

Bob departed presently for the mail. Emily and Jim and Martha sat together on the veranda till Jim, hearing a neighbor coming to call, escaped to his room. The caller left, the outraged Martha was sent to bed, Bob came back from the post office. Jim joined them. They sat wondering where the boy was.

"I'll go and see what's become of him! I'll have a look around," Bob volunteered, cheerfully. "Maybe he's lost his way. Don't you worry. I'll find him."

Emily and Jim were left together.

"Jim," asked Emily, directly, as soon as Bob had gone, "What happened to-day?"

"I don't know, Emily. I don't know, myself. I don't understand—what's happened to him," Jim murmured.

Emily said to herself: "I've been direct enough. If he doesn't want to tell me, he doesn't have to."

But he began, with an effort: "Everything went wrong, from

the first minute I saw him. It was all—different from what I had imagined beforehand. I was standing at the gate, there, in the station, waiting for him. I was excited, I guess. He didn't appear, and I went inside, and a man came up to me, with a policeman, and asked if I was Kenworthy. I got a shock, Emily! I thought something had happened to him. And the man began talking loud. They were both mad. He said if they had to take the door off, I would have to pay for it. I couldn't make head or tail of what they were saying. We got to the car, and the nurse was there, and she started in at me. She was furious. She said if she had known what she was getting into, she never would have brought the boy out. Not for any money. Said she had been deceived. And there stood the conductor, and they sent for the station master, or some one —a lot of trainmen. And the boy wasn't there. And, Emily, he had barricaded himself—inside a washroom—a women's washroom—and they couldn't get in to him, and he wouldn't come out. They'd pried up the window into the toilet, and he had that door fastened shut some way. His mother had sent a plain-clothes man with him. I suppose it's the smart thing to send detectives with rich children. Bronson hadn't liked the nurse, and he had hidden from her, and she had told the detective and they had hunted through all the train, and finally they found this washroom barricaded. They thought, of course, something was wrong. They thought something must have happened. And I stood there, with all that gang, in the heat, while a carpenter came and took the door off! And, Emily, there he was, sitting on one of the suitcases he had barricaded the place with! They'd been pounding and yelling, trying to get an answer out of him, thinking—all sorts of things. And when the door was off, there he sat, glaring at them. They were all so

mad they didn't know what to do! The plain-clothes man said he had done it just to annoy him. They all swore at *me!* I didn't know why he had done it. I was so relieved to see him all right—not—fainted, or anything! It was the hottest place in the train. It didn't seem possible he had chosen to stay there two hours. I couldn't help thinking that the madder they all got, the better pleased he was with himself. He hardly said a word to me. I didn't scold him, or anything, the rest of them were making such a lot of racket. I paid them for the damages. I never said a word about it to him, for a long time. He—didn't seem talkative. I didn't want to get in bad with him again. It seemed—last summer—I was—I wasn't myself, and I was irritable with him. I was determined that he wouldn't find me that way this time. When we got on the train, coming home, I asked him what it was all about. And he said—he said to me—he gave me to understand he didn't want to discuss it with me. We didn't—talk much. He ate chocolate all the way out. If I'd ever imagined he'd be so—outrageous to you, Emily—"

"Why, that's the funniest thing I've heard for a long time! They must have done something to make him angry, or something else must have happened, Jim. Maybe—I don't know—he'll tell you what really happened when—he feels more at home here."

"You know all that I know about it. I never expected him —to—to be so— Imagine him sitting there, in that washroom, glaring at me when the door opened!"

"I was never more surprised than when I saw him. He's going to be a larger man than either of you two."

"His grandfather Bronson was a very large man. I never supposed he could grow that much in a year, Emily!"

"Boys change so fast!" she murmured. "I can see he has a very strong personality."

"A strong personality! Well, if you want to call it that—"

"Do you know what I was thinking at supper, Jim? I thought to myself that he didn't look exactly happy. He didn't look—you know—like a happy person."

Jim sniffed.

"I shouldn't think he would be happy, acting that way. Emily, you're a peach! Nobody but you would have stood that! He ought to have been thrown out of the house!"

"Oh no, Jim! You've got to make allowances for him. Think what a hot trip he's had! He's tired out. It's mostly the weather."

"The weather! If he is tired out, what'd he work all the afternoon in that stuffy hole, piling the chairs and his luggage together, for! What'd he barricade himself in a room like that for!"

"I suppose he hadn't any place else to barricade himself in," replied Emily, demurely.

"It's like you to make excuses for him!" Jim cried. "But if it's going to be so bad—"

"Don't tell me I'm making excuses for him!" Emily retorted. "I say that boy isn't happy and it doesn't mean anything to you, because you weren't unhappy when you were a child. I often think about this, Jim. Everybody used to pity you and Bob when you were children, because your mother was a widow and had such poor health. But nobody ever pitied me, that I know of, because I lived in this house. And when I remember how unhappy I was, as a child, I could almost cry for myself! It seems to me now I was never happy a minute till—until I was married. Till I got away." She thought, "He remembers

how happy I was when we loved each other!" She went on: "I used to vow, before Martha was born, that she should be happy if I had to die for it. I can't tell you how much I used to think about it. And you know how it was. You couldn't keep Martha from being happy! You just had to tie a handkerchief up to look like a rag doll, and she sat and made up little games about it, half the day. It seems as if she was always happy. Don't you think that?"

"I certainly do, Emily! She's always happy. It's herself she enjoys, you might say."

"Yes, you see that! But you can't imagine how *I* was! How *lonely* I used to be. I'll tell you another thing, Jim. I think about this a lot. One Christmas I got a big doll and Mary McPherson got a doll, and one Saturday afternoon I had taken my doll over there, soon after Christmas, to play, and she let hers fall on the brick walk, and its head broke all to pieces. I remember how she went crying, yelling, into the house, and I followed her. There was scarcely a piece left large enough to pick up. And her father happened to be at home that afternoon—her mother had gone some place—and she ran crying into his office. You remember his patients used to have to go to that office he built to the east, there. I never forgot that. He was reading. And he heard her, and put down his book, and took her in his lap, and patted her, and he kissed her, and said he would get her another doll. He said he never thought that one had a strong constitution. I remember that. And then —do you know what he did? He pulled out a great big man's handkerchief and wiped her tears away with it! I was standing there against the door, watching him. And I tell you honestly, all at once I ached all over with envy. It never occurred to him that I wanted him to take me on his lap. I just loved

that handkerchief! And I turned and ran home, all upset. And when I got home, I felt so queer that I lay down on the sofa. And my aunt came in and asked me what ailed me. And I told her my throat was sore. It was, too. It was full of tears. I know that now. And she put a mustard plaster on me and put me to bed. You needn't laugh. There's nothing funny about it, I can tell you! And afterward, you know—you can laugh at this, if you want to, because I can see it has its ridiculous aspects, —our house-cleaning woman married, and she wasn't young any more. I had never known till that time that people of that age could get married. Sometimes when I thought of Dr. McPherson's handkerchief, I used to pray that auntie would get married. Guess who to, Jim! She'd turn over in her grave if she heard this. She'd come right down from heaven to reprove me. You remember that nice little old man that used to start the fires in our church, and sweep it out? Well, that was the man I chose for her, because he always spoke so kindly to us youngsters. Imagine that match, can you! It's all right to joke about it now, but when I see a child not normally happy it makes me sick. It's as if it was all bent down under some great weight. And that's what I think is the trouble with Bronson. We've got to have patience."

"You're sometimes a perfect— Sometimes you're angelically kind. I couldn't keep my temper, at dinner, there! I felt like—"

She waited. He didn't finish.

"But you did keep it!"

"No, I didn't! I warn you, I won't have him acting that way to you. I'll make some other arrangements."

"You can't judge anything by to-night, Jim. Honestly. It was a difficult place for him. Coming among strangers. Coming —from—very gay places, to this—little place, and to the West,

and everything!" But in her mind was that curious tale of the barricaded washroom. Perhaps Bob was right when he said the boy hadn't good sense. But she went on, trying to divert him.

She talked till Bob came home, somewhat belated.

"Has he gone to bed?" he asked, at once.

"No. He hasn't come back."

"Oh, he hasn't! Well, I guess—he'll be along. I didn't see anything of him. You go to bed, Jim. You've had a bad enough day. I'll wait for the boy. I'm not sleepy yet."

Jim did go to bed, after a while. Then Bob said to Emily:

"What in the devil's become of him? I looked the town over. Maybe he's in a movie. Couldn't see him if he was there."

Emily sighed. They waited in silence. When they looked at the time again, it was half past eleven—a shocking hour for a child of fourteen who has been traveling. Emily was disturbed.

"Let's go and walk around and see if we can find him," she suggested.

They walked downtown. They looked in at all the soda fountains, and Bob searched the pool room. They came back up toward home, on the boulevard, two blocks away. They went on walking out to the end of it.

"There he is!" whispered Emily.

"Where?"

She showed him. Surely that was the boy sitting alone in the darkness, on a water main. They stood watching him. He was perfectly motionless.

Emily pitied him. "He looks lonely!" she exclaimed.

Bob grunted. He was about to call to him.

"Let me go, Bob!" she murmured. She started toward him. "If I ask him to do anything, he'll refuse!" she said to herself.

"Bronson, I just wanted to tell you we're going to bed. You can come in whenever you want to. The door's unlocked. You might lock it, if you think of it. It really doesn't make much difference," she hastened to add.

"Don't you lock your doors?" he growled.

"Sometimes. Sometimes we forget to. This isn't a city really, you know. It really doesn't make much difference. Good night, dear. You've had a long journey. I hope you get a good rest. Your uncle has put a fan in your room for you. Don't hesitate to keep it on, if you need it."

He didn't reply. His head was poked out toward her curiously.

"Good night," she repeated, and returned, unanswered, to Bob.

Chapter Ten

EMILY and her husband and her daughter were eating their breakfast in peace but cautiously. There was this advantage in having the boy go to bed so absurdly late. It kept him sound asleep late the next morning. Emily had heard him come noisily into the house and go up to his room, after twelve, the evening before. And she judged he was still sleeping. She had wondered vaguely if he had barricaded his door. In whatever state he was, his absence gave Martha a fine chance to speak her mind to her mother.

"Isn't he a terribly bad boy, mother!" she exclaimed, eating her cantaloupe. "I never supposed my cousin would be such a bad boy! He isn't much like Uncle Jim! He's the horridest boy I ever saw in my life! He thinks he's so smart and big!"

"You don't really know him yet, Martha."

"I guess I know him as well as I want to! The horrid thing! I thought, of course, Uncle Jim's boy would be a nice boy. I wish he'd go home!"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that, Martha! You haven't had time to judge him yet. Maybe after a while, when you get to know him, you'll like him!"

"Oh, mother! I will *not* like him! Never! What makes him so sassy to Uncle Jim? Uncle Jim isn't cross or anything to him!"

"I think he—I think he's shy, Martha!" Strange how it hurt Emily to hear anything that belonged to Jim criticized.

"Well, I guess he isn't very shy or he wouldn't smell our

food. Did you see what he did? He just took up his pie and *smelled* it!"

"I know, Martha, but, after all—"

"I'd like to know what you'd say if I took up anything from my plate and smelled it, like it was poison, when I was visiting anywhere! I guess you wouldn't say *I* was shy, mother!"

"Of course that was—rude. But you mustn't forget who he is, Martha! He's Uncle Jim's boy, and of course Uncle Jim doesn't like to see him behaving so badly. You could see that, couldn't you? So we aren't going to let on that we notice anything peculiar—in his manners. We'll just—overlook it, for a while. You avoid him to-day, till he feels a little more at home. We don't want Uncle Jim to be worried about him, do we?"

"You needn't think I'll speak to him! He hasn't spoken to me yet. He's the horridest boy I ever heard of, and I don't want him living here. I don't want him in our house!"

"Well, he's going to be here for six weeks. You can make up your mind to that, my friend. And if you like Uncle Jim, you'll never let him see that you don't like his boy. Remember that, now, Martha!"

But nearly four hours passed without a sound from the boy's room. Then he came down and went directly out of the house. Emily went up to his room. She had wondered if it would be barricaded. It wasn't that, altogether. It was sacked, rather. The contents of bags and trunks were hurled over it. There was a pair of shoes on top of the dresser. There were cigarette ashes on the floor near the bed. The bottom sheet was pulled violently from its place. The pillows lay where they had landed, apparently after experiencing violence. And there were wrappers from at least eleven cakes of nut chocolate.

Emily wondered if he could have been saving them up to litter the room. But they seemed to have fallen freshly from their contents.

After that, she didn't wonder that Bronson didn't put in an appearance at lunch time. Jim wondered uneasily where he was. But Emily said it was only natural that he should have a look around the town. He didn't feel quite at home, she explained. She wouldn't wonder if a meal among strangers was something of an ordeal for him. She didn't add it certainly would be an ordeal for the strangers. But Jim sniffed, as if he was convinced of it. Bob loitered about, smoking with Jim, after dinner, waiting to see what would happen. But it grew late and he had to go back to his work. Jim went up to his room. Emily took up her Red Cross knitting, preparing herself mentally against an approaching crisis.

Martha had scarcely gone out to play, after her nap, when she came running in.

"Oh, mother!" she cried. "Come here and listen! That Bronson is swearing at Mr. Cooper! They're having a fight, mother! They're going to fight!"

Emily arrived at the porch door in time to hear her precious nephew crying: "You do what I say, you old tramp! You get up! I'll show you!"

She rushed toward him, wondering if Jim was awake to hear the fuss. "Bronson!" she cried. "Bronson!" She called apologetically: "I forgot to tell you. Come here!"

"What you want!" he answered, roughly.

She went up to him and took hold of his arm. "Sh-h!" she whispered, mysteriously. "I forgot to tell you. That's not a tramp. That's our neighbor, who takes care of the lawn. You

can't speak to him that way. You can't speak to anyone out here that way!"

"I'd like to know why I can't!"

"Oh, of course you can if you want to. But I mean, if you do—people will think you aren't much—you're just some—loafer, they'll think. Some scrub." She was inspired. "They might even think you *poor!*" She had to suppress a chuckle at her own invention. She saw she was making her point.

"I told that old fool to get my ball, and he won't! He's got to get my ball out of those thorny things or get out!" Bronson indicated the raspberry bed. "I'm not a-going into that!"

"But look here, Bronson. We don't order him about in that tone. Do you know who that man is? He's a *hero!* That's what he is! He is one of my father's old friends. Come on with me and I'll tell you something. Did you see how he can't raise his arm? Well, that's because he got it shot through in battle."

She was dragging him toward the house, his arm securely through hers. The old man, who had risen when she came out, had dived into the plot of raspberries, and came handing her the ball.

"Oh, Mr. Cooper!" she said. "This is Jim's boy. He didn't know you. He came only last night. Thank you so much! It's a hot day for you to be working. Don't you want to go in and ask Kate for some lemonade? There's a lot of it on ice. I'm sure you need some!"

She went on talking soothingly to the boy till she got him seated in the living room.

"I ought to have told you about that man," she said, as if the whole thing had been her fault. "He's never lifted that arm since 'sixty-four. Think how many years that is! It's

wonderful how he works and earns his living. He was carrying his regiment's colors when he was shot. It wasn't one of the battles you are always hearing about. But it was great enough. He lay wounded there till the end of the battle. He didn't get his wound dressed for four days, either! You can see that old, ragged, faded flag in a case there at Springfield, and you can see his very blood on it! My father was his captain, and he died so long ago I can hardly remember him, but old men like Mr. Cooper, who were his comrades, tell me about him. Mr. Cooper just loves to tell war stories. They aren't all true, of course, but that one is about his wound and the colors. He lives in the funniest house, Bronson. You'd be surprised to see it. Maybe I'll take you there, some day. It's all papered over on the inside with pictures from magazines and papers. And he's got two valuable letters there. One's from Grant to Sherman, and the other is Sherman's answer to Grant. He was a scout at one time. He used to carry messages for them, and that's how he got those letters, they say. Anyway, he has them. And the town library's to have them when he dies. He smokes so much that the librarian got afraid that he'd burn his little house down, sometime, and tried to get him to give him the letters. And do you know what he did! He went and took 'most all his savings out of the bank,—and he hasn't much,—and bought a safe—a very large safe indeed, that takes up most of the room in his little bedroom. And there he keeps his treasures. He'd let us see them, of course, if we went down. And that makes me think. There's a letter in that bookcase that John Brown wrote to your grandfather when he was in prison waiting for death. You know John Brown, whose soul goes marching on? I'll get it for you. And some of Wendell Phillips's. Your great-grandfather was a great old abolitionist."

The boy had scarcely taken his wondering eyes from her face since she had begun speaking. He watched her in a bewildered way as she went to the bookcase and got the letters out. They didn't interest him greatly, she saw. He looked at them.

"Faded old things," he commented, gruffly, and then bent toward her as if he was near-sighted, trying to see her clearly.

"Of course they're faded. But I've got plenty of copies of them made. And here's something you'd like to see, maybe." She pulled out from behind the encyclopædia that hid it a carefully wrapped bundle. "Here's my father's sword."

He was interested in that. He scrutinized it in silence. He turned it over and felt it. He read the inscription on it. He looked to see where it had been made. It held his attention for some minutes. And when he handed it back to her, and she stood wrapping it again, he remarked, in a more normal tone than she had yet heard him use:

"I suppose that'll be mine some day."

"Yours? No. It isn't *your* grandfather's, you know. It's *my* father's. That's going to be Martha's." She spoke as simply and kindly as she could, and realized that she had displeased him.

"Well, I don't care. I'll buy a better one!"

"How can you?"

"Why can't I?"

"Well, how can you buy a sword your grandfather wore, when he never wore one. Your grandfather was too young by far to be in the war, and his father was too old. There are some things money can't buy," she added. "He'll have to get that idea into his head sometime," she thought to herself.

"What?"

"Well, grandfathers' swords, for instance." She let that soak in, and then she continued:

"And, anyway, if I were you, I'd a lot rather have those letters. They show more about your ancestors than swords can. For, after all, lots of cowards and foolish men have worn swords, but John Brown didn't write a letter full of friendship, like that one, for nothing."

And she went on to tell him how John Brown's men used to ride across the country with slaves hidden in their wagons, and fierce bulldogs on the front seat to guard them. He listened so that she was encouraged, and she went from underground railways to the first days of her grandfather's life in Illinois. He began listening intently, interested almost as much, she saw, in the story as in the teller. Right out there, where those lilacs are, she told him, pointing, there was in those first days a little chicken house. And the Indians used to come along the river and ask for chickens. Awful beggars, those Indians were. And her grandmother would tell them which chickens she would give them, and they would pick up a little pebble, and throw it, and hit the chicken's neck so that it fell down dead in its tracks. The pebble never missed. They were friendly Indians, but her grandmother was always a little bit afraid of them because of their record before that. Her husband's cousin had been working with him, hauling the stone for this house from the quarry, when the Indians had scalped him. About ten miles over there they found him—

"Have you got that?" The question jumped impulsively out of his mouth.

"Got what?"

"The scalp!"

"Why, no, we haven't! The Indians got that, I suppose."

She realized for the first time the family's shiftlessness in letting so interesting a relic get away from it. "But he's buried in the cemetery here. The first white man to be buried for many miles around. A hundred miles, maybe. The cemetery was just near the road they went on hauling the stone over."

Afterward she was astonished to recall the old tales that had come back to her mind when she needed them. It seemed no time till the clock struck four.

"Why, I'd no idea it was so late!" she exclaimed. Jim, she thought, must be having a good rest. "I must see where Martha is." She rose to go, and the boy called after her, curiously:

"Who's paying you for this?"

"For what?" she asked, stopping.

"For talking to me this way." And then, seeing that she was displeased by his question, he added, defensively, "Well, nobody ever *does* talk to me unless they're paid for it!"

She stood looking at him for a moment, and then she went swiftly over to where he was sitting, and put her hands on his shoulders.

"Why, you dear"—she had almost said "child." "Why, you dear *man!* Bronson! *Nobody* pays me for talking to you! I just do it because I *like* to!" And she bent down and kissed him on his forehead.

He stammered, embarrassed, incredulous. "You *like* having me here!"

"Of *course* I like having you here! Look who you *are!* Why shouldn't I? You're your father's son, and your grandmother's grandson, and the only man of this generation named Kenworthy! We've been looking forward to seeing you for weeks. Your uncle's told everyone he knows that you were coming. He's got a name for you. 'It'll be pretty nice to have young Jim

here, won't it?' he's said every day for I don't know how long. And, anyway, if you weren't our nephew, we'd like you for yourself. It's nice to have a nice boy around the house!"

Bronson snickered bitterly.

"I'm not a nice boy!" he exclaimed.

She grinned at his little joke.

"Well, *I'm not!*" He had got back some of his defiant air.

"Aren't you funny!" she remarked, giggling. "You have such queer ideas! What ever made you think you're not a nice boy!"

"Everyone says so!" he exclaimed, indignant over her stubbornness.

"You believe all you hear? You oughtn't to, really. You're too big for that sort of thing."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you believe people when they tell you about Santa Claus?" She knew that would be a rather dangerous question.

He scorned to answer such an insult.

"It's the same thing!" she declared, sweetly. "They've been stuffing you. And you believed them. Now I can see right through you, and I can see oceans of good in you."

He sat looking at her in absolute bewilderment.

"Of course I can!" she assured him. "You're like your father!"

He came out of his confusion to catch at that. "Am I?" he asked, eagerly.

"I think you are."

He was so gratified by her declaration that he forgot for the moment her strange theory about his goodness.

"Do you think I *look* like him?" He peered out at her eagerly, bending toward her for an answer.

"Well, no. I don't think you *look* like him. Not really.

But you look a lot like his mother. You've got eyes and a forehead and coloring just like hers. You can see that for yourself," she added when she saw that she had happened to please him. She handed him a picture of his grandmother from her desk. To her surprise, he took it, and remained perfectly motionless before it, studying it with something like passion. She sat watching him, wondering, hearing the clock tick on. It was some little time before he looked up at her and asked, with an eagerness that almost trembled.

"Do you think I look like that?" He put the picture between his knees, and took off his glasses, and wiped his forehead. Of course it was a hot day. She hadn't noticed how he was perspiring.

"You certainly do," she replied. "You look a lot like her. And that's a great thing. I always wished Martha would be like her. But she isn't. Not a bit."

He put his glasses on and took the picture in his hands and went to the window, to see it better.

"Why?" he asked, suddenly.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean why is it a great thing to be like her?"

"Because of the sort of woman she was. She was really a great woman. I really think she was the greatest woman I ever knew."

"How do you mean great?"

"Well, I can scarcely explain to you. She never *did* anything great. She was a shy person. She never had much strength, and she was ill a great deal. She was left a widow, you know, when your uncle was a baby. And she was poor, terribly poor. And she just lived along, as we all do. And yet when she was buried, I tell you, Bronson, that there were more cars and

carriages in the streets of this town than there are on the Fourth of July. Everybody knew her and everybody loved her."

"Wasn't she a liar?" asked Bronson, hopefully.

Emily recoiled, shocked.

"Goodness, Bronson, what a question! What a word! Of *course* she wasn't a liar! She was as far from being a liar as any woman ever gets. She was accurate in all she said. I think it used to bother her that sometimes—well, I had a habit of exaggerating. And she taught Martha never to exaggerate. Not when I knew it, of course. But once when I was on the train with Martha, she said to me, 'Oh, mother, I see a horse in a car!' And then presently she said to me, soberly. 'No mother, I didn't really see a whole horse in a train. I only saw a horse's head!' And of course I said to her that if the horse's head was there, it was almost sure that the rest of him was. And I know she never got any inclination to accuracy from me! It was her grandmother that taught her that scruple."

"Huh!" commented Bronson.

Emily thought, "They have been telling him at home something not true about his father's family. No telling what they've said. I'll just fix that right."

"You know how it was your grandfather died, don't you, Bronson?"

"I heard about it, I guess. Was it at that station we came in at?"

"Yes, but that depot wasn't there then. Well, that's what the Kenworthys are like! That was a magnificent thing to do. Of course he didn't have time to think, to plan. He just acted on his impulses. That's the point, of course. He was *impulsively* generous, and brave. His instinct was to save that child, without thinking of his own safety. And your grandmother's

family was distinguished. There's mighty few in the country with better stuff behind them than you, Bronson. You know about that lad of her family who commanded an American warship during the Revolutionary days, who was married and had a child or two, and commanded a ship when he was twenty? You've never heard that? Well, when he was sixteen or seventeen, he was some sort of a junior officer on a sailing ship, going to Italy, and before he got there the captain and all the officers died. And he took that ship across and into harbor alone, without any help. And when the Italians saw how young he was, they tried to get the cargo away from him, and they put him into a prison, a dungeon, and they kept him there nearly a year. And finally—I've forgotten how it was—some American in France, I think it was, heard of him (maybe it was Benjamin Franklin) and got him out, and got his money back for him, and his ship, and the boy took it home to Boston. And he went to the office of the ship's owner, to report, and the ship's owner was out of sorts, and so angry with the boy for saying he had done that himself, that he took him by the collar and kicked him out of the room. But he proved what he said, and handed over the money, and got the ship to command again. And he did so well that he commanded an American warship before he was twenty. Some boy, that!"

"Huh! I could have done that myself!"

Emily exclaimed, impulsively, "I'm *sure* you could have!"

No sooner had she said it than she regretted it. What a conceited little snob he was already, without her adding to his high opinion of himself! But some way there was such a look of invincibility about him, that she had believed he could do it. And as she was wondering about the impressiveness of him, he remarked, bitterly:

"I travel with a nurse!"

"Not with a nurse," she corrected, gently.

"I travel with a nurse!" he repeated.

"So that's what's the trouble!" she reflected, glad to get to the bottom of the matter. And before she could say anything, he added, almost humbly:

"I don't know whether I could have done that or not. I don't know *everything* about navigation."

"Don't you, really?" she asked, soberly. "But you could learn. And if you were left with a ship on your hands, you'd rise to the occasion, I imagine. Martha has a book with all that story in it—lots more than I have told you. I'll get it for you to read. It's a great thing to have ancestors like that." There was a silence. When she looked up at him when he began speaking, she saw that he was blushing red.

"Look here," he began, "it doesn't make any difference, does it, whether you've got ancestors like that or not?"

She had to say what she believed.

"Certainly it does!" she replied. "It makes all the difference in the world. There's nothing like knowing the stuff that's back of you. It bucks you up and makes you alert, hopeful, and ready for anything that comes along, to know your forebears were people of nerve and courage, and spirit—honest and sane people. That's a sort of rich inheritance, I always think."

"But if they haven't got that kind, they can't help it," he went on, doggedly. "It isn't their fault."

She thought, "He's a nice child, thinking about less fortunate people that way." Aloud she said: "That's true. They can't help it. But it's unfortunate. Bronson," she added, affectionately, "I've really got to go. You're so interesting, I didn't

know how late it was. Supper'll be ready in an hour now. You want to see that book?"

"Is it a story book, or is it true?"

"It's true."

She gave it to him and went into the hall. She almost ran into Jim. She said to him, earnestly:

"Oh, Jim! He's just a sweet, sweet child. I like him so well! I've been talking to him a long time. I kissed him! Maybe I oughtn't to have, he's so big. You don't mind, do you!"

She was all illumined by her excitement about his boy. Her face was shining and soft. She stood nearer him than she often did. He stood looking at her, and his thin face lighted up with an expression of passionate gratitude, of admiration.

"Did I ever mind?—" he said, impulsively.

"I must see about supper," she murmured, retreating. He stood ashamed of himself. Then he went on into the living room.

Chapter Eleven

He saw his alienated son standing by the window, bent intently over a picture in his hand. The boy was so absorbed in it that he started at his father's entrance. He turned around at once and sank down into an armchair, letting his arms fall relaxed into his lap. He sighed a sigh which seemed to come from the depths of his consciousness, a sigh of relief and bewilderment.

"Gee!" he muttered, "this is a swell town!"

Jim hid a smile. He asked, with no great assurance of manner, "What you been doing all day?"

"She's been talking to me."

He seemed so surprised at that that Jim said: "That's fine! You'll like your aunt, Bronson. I hope you'll appreciate her."

This was too much like advice, like a warning.

"Huh!" was grunted, forbiddingly.

Jim was rebuffed. He didn't know how to go on, exactly. He had meant to give his son a thoroughly good talking-to, to tell him a few things he'd got to know. Now he was so pleased at what seemed to be a surrender on the lad's part to Emily's gentleness, that he was afraid of bringing back that insolent hostility of the day before. He walked to the door and looked out, and then came back and sat down, with his paper near him. He pretended to be reading.

Presently the boy's voice broke forth. "Do you think I look like this?" He had been trying to ask the question for some time.

Jim laid down his paper. He saw his son looking earnestly at his grandmother's picture.

"Like my mother?" he asked, studying the eager, impertinent face before him. "No, I can't say that I ever thought you were like her—like the Kenworthys. You're going to be a much larger man than we are. You're more like your mother's father, if you're like anyone. He was a very large man and well built. Everybody used to say—"

Before he could finish his sentence the boy had risen angrily and dropped the framed picture on the bare table. He rushed out of the room and slammed the screen door behind him violently.

Jim got up and followed him. "There's no use slamming a door every time you go through one!" he remarked, sarcastically.

Bronson was standing on the porch, facing the garden. When his father spoke to him he turned and glared at him for a second, and then he opened the porch door, went out of it, slammed it behind him with all his might, and walked down the path toward the river.

Jim resisted an impulse to run after him, to lay violent hands on him. He thought, sorely: "Emily just begins to get hold of him, and as soon as I come along he gets wild again! I don't know what's happened to him. He can't go on acting like this. I never thought this of him!" Then he felt suddenly tired all over. He felt as if his bones melted, grew too soft to support him. He wanted only to sit down. He was too weary to live. Just a few minutes ago, as he came down the stairs, he had felt unusually rested; he had said to himself that he was getting on. And so slight an excitement had already reduced him again to exhaustion. He sat down on the porch. When Emily came out she wondered again at the dejection of his attitude.

"We aren't going to have any trouble with that boy, Jim," she said, reassuringly.

"Aren't we? You always were an optimist, Emily."

"Well, you needn't think I mind being called an optimist. You can't bother me that way!"

He sat looking at her with all his might, with his weakened body, his weary mind, his starved heart, his sick soul. He was sore right through his being. The memory of the past hurt him, the realization of the present chafed him, the prospect of the future tortured him. Life altogether baffled him. Here before him was this woman, his brother's unappreciated wife, the most excellent, the most comfortable, the most lovable woman he had known of his generation, whom he might once have married. And he had simply, thoughtlessly, like the most utterly contemptible young fool in the world, undervalued her, let her go, preferred the woman who had divorced him. He had watched her intimately now for years. She had been an attractive girl. She grew more attractive to him, more pleasant to look at, year by year. He had seen her with Bob, enduring Bob's poverty proudly, almost gaily, and, as far as he could make out, without reproaching Bob for it. If only he as a young man could have foreseen she would have had the grace to live as she had lived, over that drug store, or in that wretched little house where Bob had put her! He had supposed she was a silly, plain little snob, like her old aunt. That's all the sense he had had! A perfect fool he was, if any man had ever been. Hadn't he seen Emily with his mother, taking care of her with the thoughtful kindness which a woman like his mother could appreciate? Hadn't he seen what sort of mother she was? Hadn't he this last week experienced her hospitality, its beautiful quality, her pity that didn't irritate,

the ease she had to lavish comfortably upon every one near her? There couldn't have been hard formality in Emily's house. Even the pleasantness of her body was a comfortable beauty, a full, easy maturity. And now her gentleness touched him in his most tender affection—she was loving with his outrageous son; she had said that boy of his was a sweet, sweet child; she had said it from the bottom of her kind heart, impulsively to him, not feigning any liking to please him. The boy was won over—at least to her, to "the swell town." Emily had done that. It was like her. It was Emily. And he, Jim Kenworthy, might have married that woman instead of the thing he had chosen. A man with no more sense than he had, deserved what he got.

Emily was calling the boy. Jim forgot his remorse. He waited anxiously to see that his son wasn't too impertinent to her.

"Bronson!" she called to him in her caressing voice. "It's time for you to come in and get ready for supper."

The boy had heard her. He turned and came at once toward her. He came in, and went up to his room, without a word. "Just look at that, now, Jim," she said. "Just as obedient as he can be. I think we'll just love him when we get to know him!"

Jim watched her closely at supper. He had known her many years, but he had never seen her in exactly that mood before. She sat there flirting with his son. Just flirting with the boy. She bent toward him and smiled. She smiled at him so that Jim said, desperately, to himself again, "Damned fool that I was!" Bronson had come down from his room with his yellow hair plastered down smoothly. And Emily looked at him as she talked, as if she admired the blond arrangement of it. The

boy had never a glance for the others at the table. He kept watching his aunt. He watched her warily, suspiciously, puzzled. She never gave him a chance to be impertinent. He didn't appear to want to be impertinent. He ate his food. He said, "Thank you" and "Please." He looked like a little lad, sitting there. His face was as soft and pink as a little girl's. Not one terrible thing happened at that supper. Bronson didn't even insist on smoking at the table. Bob said to Jim as they left the room:

"Emily's got him going, all right. She's the limit."

And then presently, after his smoke, Bob said to the boy, who had taken his seat as close as possible to his aunt, as if he were still wanting to get a good look at her:

"Do you want to come down with me for the mail?"

"Huh!" answered Bronson, scornfully. "There's nothing to see down there. I'll stay here."

Bob snickered. "He's a Kenworthy, all right, Jim."

"He seems to be," replied Jim. "He seems to be," avoiding his brother's eye.

Emily changed the subject, annoyed. "Bob hasn't any sense at all!" she said to herself. "I'll make him quit that! He isn't going to tease this child."

Chapter Twelve

Bob said to him the next morning at seven-thirty breakfast, at which he had arrived of his own will to sit beside his aunt: "You want to go down to the garage with me this morning, Bronson?"

"What garage?"

"My garage."

"Have *you* got a garage?"

"You bet I have!"

Bronson was peering across the table at his uncle as if for the first time he had realized his existence. "Sure I'll go!" he said.

Bob glanced at Emily. He seemed to say, "Well, you've got me in for it now!" It was Emily who had insisted on his asking Bronson.

"You've got to do your part, Bob. I can't sit and talk to him all day. If Jim had heard him yelling at Mr. Cooper, he'd have been so annoyed he wouldn't have got to sleep all the afternoon. You can just take him down there and keep him all the forenoon. You can give him a little time, I should hope. He's as important as any other work, anyway! He's the most pitiful child I ever saw. Absolutely the most pitiful! *Why* did he say that to me? Why did he say no one ever talked to him unless they were paid for it? There's something wrong somewhere. It doesn't matter if he *is* impertinent. You can just put up with him for a while!"

Emily almost sighed with relief when she heard Bronson consenting so readily to go. It was good to see the two of them

depart together, leaving the house in peace. Half the morning passed. Jim was still in his room. She went about wondering what the boy was doing, where he had gone, how Bob was faring. She phoned down to the garage. She judged, by what her husband answered her, that he spoke within hearing distance of Bronson. But she gathered that at least he was there with Bob and that Bob was enduring him as patiently as she could expect him to. She resolved to devote her afternoon to him.

She and Jim were standing in the hall, waiting uneasily for Bob to come to dinner, to hear his report of the morning. They saw a car stop abruptly in front of the house. They saw Bronson jump out of the driver's seat, and Bob from the other. And Emily saw, with a very thrill of pleasure, that they both were happy. She was so relieved she could scarcely believe her eyes. The boy was running into the house, toward her.

"Look at me!" he exclaimed. He stretched out his hands for inspection. "Ain't I dirty! Ain't I *black!* Gee! look at me!"

He *was* dirty. He *was* black. And he was gloating over his progress in untidiness. He had on a good new suit, which had been gray in the morning. And now it, too, was black. It was ruined, greasy, stained with oil, absolutely grimy, like an old pair of mechanic's overalls. Emily was shocked by the débris of it. But she had to respond to his pleasure in his state.

"You certainly *are* dirty! You're a sight. You'd better get that stuff off your hands in the lavatory down here! Don't take that to your bathroom!" And as he started to obey her, she added, "And, Bronson! After you have used your towels, you may as well hang them up. There's no use throwing them on the floor, is there?"

"Sure I'll hang 'em up," he replied, indulgently. As soon as the boy was out of hearing, Bob broke forth,

"By golly! that's some kid, Jim! He's a whiz! He's a humdinger! He's worth as much to me as six of the ordinary loafers I get to work for me nowadays. The men thought they'd guy him. They thought he was green. They gave him a job they thought nobody could do. And you ought to have seen them when he finished it! By heck! he knows more about a car than the whole lot of them. He's worked every minute since he got there. You don't ever need to worry about that kid!"

Emily looked at Jim's face, and she felt young. She felt like shouting thanksgiving. Jim stood looking absolutely silly, he was so pleased. He couldn't doubt Bob's blunt sincerity. Bob wasn't capable of pretending to like the boy.

"Oh, Bob!" she murmured. And then she said, "But his suit, Bob! He's ruined it! Why didn't you give him a pair of overalls? I don't suppose even a cleaner can get that grease out of that color."

"Huh!" Bob looked at her in surprise, almost disgust. "His suit!" he repeated. "What's the difference? Hasn't his—" He remembered Jim and paused. "Doesn't matter!" he muttered. "That kid's all right. He *likes* to work. He's no trouble to anyone!" And he went to wash.

"Now isn't that nice!" Emily cried to Jim. She smiled a long, sweet, reassuring smile at him. Jim ought to have some pleasure out of his child. That was the only hope in the world for him. She almost prayed that Bronson would behave himself during dinner.

But she realized as soon as they were seated that she needn't have worried about that. Bob began talking to his nephew.

He talked to him—rather he listened to him—all through the meal, and half an hour afterward. He sat at the table and watched him intently—as the boy had watched Emily the day before—his shrewd eyes screwed up, estimating him, sizing him up. And he was impressed. He listened with respect to the answers the boy gave as if he had been talking to some expert. They ranged, forgetful of the others, through pleasant pastures of the mind closed forever to the non-mechanical. They were talking about those things Emily never understood—engines and motors. But she could understand Bob's face. And she had to motion to Jim, needlessly, to watch it. Bob's surprise obviously grew by bounds. They sat there long after the meal was over, until it was time to go back to work. They rose, all the four of them, together. Bronson started again to go with Bob.

"You aren't going downtown again, are you?" Emily asked him.

"Sure I am," he said, not rudely, only surprised that there could be any question about it.

She waylaid Bob.

"You must get him some overalls," she began.

"Aw, Emily, forget it!" Bob protested. "Ain't that woman rich? Let him spoil his clothes. The more she has to buy him, the less money she'll have to fight against Jim with, damn her!"

"Oh, Bob! But you can't let the boy just learn to treat clothes that way! The price of a new suit of clothes isn't going to affect the amount of her income. And it'll spoil him!"

"Rats! He's a good kid, Emily, if he is crazy. He acts all right when he gets down to work. What can you expect of him, living with her? No wonder he looked wild yesterday—

the day before yesterday—when he got here. The wonder is he isn't crazy altogether."

"But, Bob, I want you to get him those overalls. I won't have him going back home with his clothes in such a condition."

"Oh, well, what's the difference? I'll get him some, if you say so—if they've got any long enough for him in town. He'll earn them, all right. He's earned them already this morning."

Chapter Thirteen

THAT evening Bob and Bronson went swimming in the river. When they came back, Bob went to his room and dressed, but Bronson sat in his wet bathing suit in front of the fan on the porch. Emily didn't approve. He dripped untidily on to the porch, and, moreover, she feared he would catch cold. She suggested that danger, and he derided it, tolerantly. It was, as he said, a very hot night. She didn't feel like insisting. The boy was quiet. He was a peaceful child as long as no one disturbed him—law-abiding, apparently, when he laid down the law for himself. With Jim sitting there, she was afraid of starting something unpleasant by insisting. And besides, he wasn't her son. It wasn't exactly her place, in the six weeks he was her guest, to teach him what they had failed to teach him at home all the other weeks of the year. So he sat there, in front of her, till Bob came down, and then he chose his seat carefully between his uncle and aunt.

The two of them began at once where they had left off their conversation coming in from the river. Emily made no attempt to join it. She listened curiously. Jim seemed hardly more able than herself to cope with the technicality of their thoughts. She and Jim were interested spectators, drawn together by their common alienation. She saw Bob sitting fascinated by the boy. Whenever they argued, it was the boy who was right. Bob had to acknowledge that every now and then. Only once was Emily aroused by the approach of an outbreak of insolence. She heard Bob say:

"Who told you that?"

"Bill," Bronson replied, shortly.

"Who's Bill?"

"My chauffeur."

"Your chauffeur? He must know a lot!"

"He knows everything. He teaches me. He saw it in Brooklyn. He can get into the factory where they make them."

"Don't you go to school?"

Then it was that the boy's voice warned him of his danger.

"I don't go to school," he drawled. And no one who cared for the peace of mind of a convalescing brother would have dared venture further questions. Bob fairly jumped to the safety of another subject.

It was that way in the uncertain days that followed. No one managed to speak to Bronson of his New York home—his father, least of all. They desired, above all things, to see him behaving normally, and the mention of the East upset him. Emily said more than once to Bob afterward, as she did later that evening:

"I can see that he's afraid we'll mention the divorce or criticize his mother. Naturally, he's sensitive. He has a very sensitive face. And he has felt this divorce. Likely all his sympathies are with his mother."

"Don't you ever fool yourself about that, Emily. That kid's got too much sense. It's more likely she told him to act like hell out here, and when he gets to work, when he's himself, he acts natural and behaves. I'll bet he sees through her. I bet he raises hell all the time he's with her. What I want to know is, why isn't he in school. I suppose Jim don't know, himself!"

Thinking the evening over, Emily was far from satisfied. It was, to be sure, something to have the time pass without violence. But the boy had stayed up too late. She hadn't had the nerve

to send him to bed. He had sounded so grown up, sitting there, explaining things to Bob. It would have seemed like sending an adult guest to bed early.

"Does he really know what he's talking about?" she asked Bob. "He talks as if he knew everything."

"Well, by heck! Emily, he *does* know everything! I tell you he's no common kid! He's an encyclopædia. I'd rather listen to that kid than anyone I know in town here. He's got more in his head."

"I don't think it's good for him, Bob. He corrects you as if he was fifty years old. And he doesn't even listen to what his father says."

"Well, I was wrong, Emily, and he was right. How can you expect the kid to have any manners, living with that woman? You got to be patient with him."

The boy continued to fascinate Bob. He wouldn't hear him criticized. Nothing could have been more gratifying to Jim, at first. Bob told the boy to go on swimming alone, the evening after his second day's work in the garage, and he sat and smoked enthusiastically with his brother.

"He's a whale of a kid, Jim! He's got a twelve-cylinder head on him! All the men just simply ask him what they want to know, and he tells them. You don't need to ever worry about his eyes! He's got so much brain he don't need better ones. He sees more now than most people do. But you don't need to think you can ever make a lawyer out of him. You let him go where his mind takes him!"

Jim smiled to himself somewhat grimly. "He'll go where his mind takes him, all right, Bob, without asking me. I don't seem to see myself stopping him, when he gets started."

"Nobody'll stop him. Look at here, Jim. I'll tell you what

I honestly think." Bob spoke very soberly. "That boy's a genius. That's what's the matter with him. That's why he don't act like an ordinary fourteen-year-old kid. When I was fourteen I couldn't think as much in a year as he can in a minute. He's a whale, clear through! And look at his temper! Look how he acts sometimes! These geniuses you read about are always acting funny, at times. They can't help it. Neither can the kid. It's the way he's made."

"That might account for some of his peculiarities." Jim spoke skeptically.

"Well, whether he's a genius or not, he's a dear child." Emily had to add her tribute. "He has some very lovable traits. Twice I have come into the living room and found him looking at mother's picture. You don't expect most boys to care much for their grandmother. Why, some boys I know just say, 'Oh, your grandmother,' when they don't believe a thing. They make slang out of it. I really wouldn't like our children to use that expression. I wish Martha was as interested in mother as he is. I can see he has a very affectionate disposition, if he doesn't want us to know it."

Someway she knew Jim was thinking that he hadn't seen any great signs of affection in his son.

And the days which followed were peaceful days, in a way.

"As peaceful as if we were storing TNT," Emily reflected. "That wouldn't make any trouble, either—till the explosion came."

Bronson ate his three meals regularly with them, and sat on the porch talking with Bob and Emily every evening. He made no trouble. The thing which Emily really resented in the boy was his indifference to his father. Bob got on with him famously. She could find nothing to criticize, seriously, in his

conduct to her. But she grew very indignant for Jim's sake. The boy didn't seem to know his father was in the house. When Jim tried to talk to him, to get near him, the insolence of the first days was a perfect weapon for keeping him away. Not that he was so outrageous as he had been just at first. He was more subtle about it, out of deference for Emily. Nevertheless, he steadily ignored his father. And that consciousness made Jim uncomfortable with him, awkward, in his attempts to be friendly.

One evening Emily said, quite easily, to Jim: "Bronson was wondering to-day if he couldn't take you for a drive in the car sometimes, Jim, in the afternoon. That time would suit you best, wouldn't it? He could bring the car up just before supper, if you'd care to go."

Jim was touched by this friendliness on the lad's part. It never occurred to him that Emily had no authority whatever for saying this suggestion came from Bronson. He turned to Bob. "Can he drive?" he asked.

"Can he *drive!* I'll say he can!"

"But he isn't old enough to drive. Aren't you afraid to trust the car to him?"

"He says he's driven all over Manhattan Island!"

"He has! Driving through that traffic! He ought to have been arrested. A child like that!"

"Well, maybe he was arrested. I don't know. He grinned all over when he told me. Said this Bill of his used to let him wear his cap and coat, and sit beside him, showing him how."

"I never heard of such a thing! It would be different on the country roads out here. But it's illegal."

"Everybody's doing it. Half the small boys in town drive. I sent the policeman after that ten-year-old Fleishman. But he

was a natural-born speed bug. Bronson's safe. He's got a head on him. And, anyway, that kid can see. It's just a habit, that way he has of looking through things. I wouldn't want a better driver, myself."

"Of course I'd like to go with him!" Jim said. He thought, "If I could get him alone awhile, maybe we could get acquainted."

So the next day they went driving. The experiment wasn't successful. They hadn't much to talk about. The boy was on the defensive, ready to spring into insolence. Nevertheless, there was this about it, that when they came back to the house, the boy said:

"You want me to take you to-morrow afternoon?"

"Yes. I'd like to go again. It's nice of you to ask me."

"Oh, that's all right," replied his lordly son. "I haven't got much to do to-morrow, anyway."

Jim went. They kept it up for four days.

The fifth day Jim heard Bronson talking to Emily after lunch.

"Do I have to take him for a ride to-day, auntie? There's going to be a tractor demonstration. I want to see it. I don't want to go with him."

And he heard Emily's most winning voice reply: "Of course you don't have to! Certainly not! You don't have to be decent and kind if you don't want to. To be sure, your father isn't well. He won't get to see you till next year, and he never gets to see you now, because you're always busy in the garage. But don't let a little thing like that move you. I just suggested the drive so you two could have some time together. But do just what you want to!"

Jim couldn't see her face, but he could imagine how she was smiling at the boy.

"Oh, auntie!" he heard him murmur.

"Go to your old tractor demonstration, if you want to."

"But you don't want me to, do you?"

"Oh, I don't care. Of course I like people to be nice once in a while—"

Jim sneaked away. He wouldn't have Emily know he had learned her little ruse. She had noticed how sore he was about the boy's indifference toward him. She had thought she could remedy it. She had tried to. Well, let her think she had succeeded, by all means. Let her think she had brought them really near together, if she could. He wondered if the boy would come to him at four. He wondered how much influence Emily had over him. He seemed to adore her. He obeyed her like a well-trained little dog. He was certainly a better-looking child when he was looking at her than at any other time. He didn't look at Bob with such genuine humble devotion. He looked at Bob as one looks at an equal of some weight. And at his own father he scarcely ever glanced.

Jim said to himself, bitterly, that this arrangement for the summer, like the rest of his life, hadn't turned out at all as he had planned. Certainly he wasn't jealous of Bob. He was grateful to him for his interest in the boy, and most deeply grateful to Emily. Her manner to the child filled him with a stronger admiration than he had known before for her. It was wonderful to see how she twisted him around her finger. And how she loved him! Was he so lovable a child, Jim asked himself, wearily, at times? Or was it for the sake of the father that Emily's voice, whenever she spoke to him, was a caress? Would she have treated any other boy so tenderly? He didn't

know. He reproved himself for asking. Here he was living off their charity. They wouldn't take a cent for board of the two. They were indignant when he mentioned such a thing. He was accepting his brother's charity and coveting his brother's wife. Not coveting, exactly, he told himself, only admiring her, with the background of their early love-making in his mind. It was safe enough, after all, since she was so scrupulous a woman —a woman utterly unapproachable. But the afternoons were so long, and the sleepless nights filled one's head so with thoughts not altogether exactly fair to Bob. But life altogether had been so devoid of satisfaction, that Jim couldn't help longing—

The boy came for him at the appointed hour. Emily had triumphed. But that day, more than before, his animosity hurt Jim. He felt he couldn't stand it. The car seemed more tiring than ever, the road more rough. He suggested, after a few minutes, that they turn back. He wasn't feeling well, he said. And he realized poignantly that the boy's pleasure at being able, after all, to get to the tractor contest was greater than his concern for his father's health.

Once in a while he would go down to that absorbing garage, and sit about talking, perhaps to old friends, though it seemed to him it was hotter there than in any other place in town. He wondered how the boy could prefer it to breezier playgrounds. When Jim was there, nothing indicated any great genius on his son's part. He usually found him lying on his back, playing among the vitals of somebody's battered Ford. Emily had been quite right about that, too. "It does seem too bad not to let him enjoy himself, if that's what makes him happy," she had said to him one day, wondering to herself what his smart mother would have said if she could have seen

him. Sometimes one of the mechanics would say something to Jim about Bronson—always the same thing, always what Bob said. "Some kid, that one! Knows how to work, I'll say. Regular encyclopædia!" Even this praise Jim swallowed. He fattened on it. He got strength from such words to long more poignantly to come to know his son.

Since Sunday was the only day the boy was in the house, Jim rose earlier that day than on others. One Sunday he came down to the living room where the family sat, and began looking over the paper for the war news. Emily sat at her desk, writing. Bob and the boy were talking submarines. Martha had gone to Sunday school. Jim let the paper fall from his hands, after a few minutes. The account of the slaughter in Europe sickened him. The paper fell from his hand, and he groaned,

"It's terrible! It's worse than ever!"

Bronson had been sitting crossways in an armchair. He had just risen, a second before, to get a magazine, and as he settled down again, in the same fashion in the chair, he remarked, for once deigning to notice what his father said:

"Gee! It makes me wish I'd got into the Canadian army, or even the navy."

Three pairs of eyes turned toward him in consternation. Bob spoke first, after a minute, with relief:

"*You* couldn't get into the army. Not at your age."

"You bet I could. I almost did!" Bronson was indignant. "There's plenty of boys no older than me in the Canadian army. I knew a boy only—"

That child had made them all believe in the horrible possibility before he had finished his story. Jim felt himself sinking down, helplessly. Emily cried:

"Bronson! How can you say such a thing?"

He looked at her, hurt. "You think I couldn't fight, don't you, because I'm fourteen? I bet I could make as many of them Heines run as anybody else could! I bet I could—"

She gave a little snicker, nervously. She was thinking that he could put a regiment to flight, almost, by looking at it with the expression he had used on her when he alighted from the train. She hastened to apologize for the slight she had given him.

"Of course you *could* fight, Bronson. But it isn't your turn. When you're older—"

"I'd like to know why it isn't my turn! I *almost* got in, I tell you. I wish't I had. I wish't I was in the artillery, with a—"

Jim couldn't stand that. He spoke too sharply. "What do you mean by that? What do you mean by you almost got into the army?"

The boy turned to him impertinently. "I mean what I say. I almost got into the army!"

He was so forbidding that Jim paused uncertainly. Emily came to his rescue.

"But you didn't get in?" she suggested, gently.

"No, I didn't. I didn't get in, but I *almost* got in. And I can get into the navy any day I want to!"

He looked around him defiantly, to see if anyone was going to try to stop him. Emily went on:

"Of course you can't expect us to be very enthusiastic about your getting into the war, Bronson. Why, we've just got acquainted with you! We want you to stick around a while, you know!" She smiled straight at him.

"Oh, I'll stick around a while yet," he murmured, surrendering to her. "You don't need to worry. I'm not going yet—for a

while, maybe." And he kicked his careless legs contentedly against the sides of the chair.

Bob got up abruptly and lit a cigar. He walked into the hall, and walked back, watching his prodigious nephew uneasily. Jim saw his expression, and he watched him take a further turn about the room and go out to the garden. Bob, too, was shocked. Emily, pretending to be writing, kept glancing at Bronson. Jim sat thinking bitterly, "If he made up his mind to go to war, who'd stop him? He'd do any wild thing that came into his head. He looks eighteen, sometimes. He might get himself taken!" The things the boy did were shocking enough. But they were nothing to the things which he some way suggested he was capable of doing. He looked strong as a young bull, at that moment, and as tractable.

That room, at least, had been peaceful enough when Jim entered it. Now the world's agony had invaded it. Jim had never thought for a minute of his son in the war. Why, the war could drag on three years yet, before he would be taken, at least three! Emily, too, was upset. She was just pretending to write. Only the boy was happy, kicking his long legs back and forth light-heartedly.

He was so good-natured again, apparently, that Emily at length ventured a suggestion which had been on her conscience ever since he had arrived. She had some sympathy still for the boy's mother. How anxious she must be about such a child!

"Bronson," she said, "I've finished my letters. Don't you want to sit down here and write to your mother?" Somebody *had* to suggest it to him.

Jim saw his son slowly rising from his chair, growing redder and redder, more and more angry. It occurred to Jim, as the child stood there speechless, that for once in his life he dared

not say what came into his head to answer. He stood there, glaring at his dear aunt, and then, with a retort which they couldn't either of them understand, he went out of the door, and slammed it so that the wall seemed to shudder behind him.

Emily rose apologetically.

"Oh, I'm *sorry!* I oughtn't to have said that! I've hurt him awfully! I don't know how I could have done that! I just thought—" she murmured.

"It isn't your fault. There's no reason why you shouldn't have said that to him. None whatever." Jim spoke heatedly. "He ought to be punished for that! He ought to be ashamed of himself! I'm sorry, Emily."

"No. It was my fault, Jim. After all, he isn't a baby, that I should tell him what to do and what not to do. Why, he almost got into the army!" She turned her head abruptly away at the very thought of that. "Think what a long time now he has been as good as can be. He's been a really nice boy for days. You mustn't expect a boy to act like an angel all the time, Jim," she protested, lightly.

"I can expect him to refrain from slamming doors, at least. I'd like to—"

He didn't finish his sentence. Martha had come in.

Bronson didn't come back for dinner. They waited him hour by hour. Emily reproached herself unhappily. "I wouldn't have dared to suggest a thing like that to Jim. I wouldn't speak to Jim about that woman, and why should I have taken a liberty with that boy just because he is young? Goodness knows what he thinks about the situation. Maybe he didn't want to come out here to his father. He's too sensitive. He takes it too hard. And, anyway, for all I know, he may write to his mother every day, from downtown. It's a terrible situation for a boy

like that. If ever there was a child that needed two parents, or even six or eight, to manage him together, it's that one. If he'd been our boy—if he'd been Jim's and mine— Oh, what in the world would I have done with a boy like that on my hands!"

Jim didn't rest that afternoon. He lay speculating about his son. Could that boy pass himself off for eighteen? Where had he gone? What was to be done with him when he returned? It was horrible to let him go on in this unbearable way. Fortunately, some old friends called that afternoon, to occupy his thoughts for a time. At supper they were all rather ill at ease but Martha. Martha enjoyed Bronson's absence almost pathetically. The two cousins never exchanged a word, except the good morning and the good night which Emily insisted on. Now Martha looked cheerfully at his vacant place as she came to the table, and asked:

"Isn't he back yet?"

Emily answered, firmly, "No, he isn't, Martha!"

In spite of the warning of her mother's voice, Martha gave a little significant giggle. Jim smiled with her. He understood that it must be a relief not to have the table monopolized by that bad boy. He began talking to her as he had done before Bronson came. And he was sorry for her when he saw how she relished his attention.

The evening passed, and still no boy appeared. Jim told himself he was a silly old hen to worry. The idea of taking seriously that threat of the army! The trouble was, since that morning hour, Jim had felt more apprehensively than before, that his son was capable of any madness. No telling what he was doing, now, at this hour. He insisted upon Bob's going to bed. He wanted to wait up and have a talk with the boy.

At midnight, when he was standing by the door in the front hall, he saw his son come lumbering along up the walk, in the glimmer of light from the house, awkward, round shouldered, his head peering out. And when he saw his father waiting for him, he bristled with defiance.

"Where've you been?" Jim asked, shortly, as he came in the door.

His son looked at him, looked him over from head to foot, with a glance of contempt. "What's it to you?" he asked, as shortly as Jim had spoken. And he started up the stairs.

Jim felt himself trembling. "Bronson!" he exclaimed, quietly. "Come here! Listen to me!" The boy condescended to stop where he was. "You have the worst manners of any human being I ever saw! You ought to be ashamed of yourself! I want you to apologize to your aunt for what you did this morning—your insolence to her! I was ashamed of you! You aren't to slam a door again in this house while you are here! You're not altogether a baby, if you do act like one!"

The boy stood looking down at him from the stairs, his lips pressed together. Jim didn't realize how the light above his head made his face look shockingly haggard. He only wondered why the boy continued to stare at him curiously. They faced each other for a few seconds. Then, without a word, Bronson turned and went up to his room.

Jim stood waiting tensely for the retort of a banging door.

But no door slammed.

Chapter Fourteen

"Has he apologized to you yet?" Jim asked when he came down to lunch the next day.

"Who?" asked Emily, innocently.

How like her it was to ask that! Jim smiled at her.

"Bronson!"

"No, he didn't apologize—not exactly."

"You mean by that he was as rude as ever?"

Emily put her head to one side, wrinkled up her lips, and smiled at him. "If I had meant that he had been rude I would have said he had been rude, wouldn't I . . . Goodness!" she thought, turning away from under his answering gaze. "I mustn't do that. I must be more impersonal!" She added, in quite another tone:

"He was perfectly nice this morning. Went away quite happily."

"I told him to apologize."

"Did you?"

"Yes, I did."

"Oh, well, Jim, how are you going to make him do it? You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. Just overlook it. The line of least resistance, we take with children, you know."

"It looks as if everybody had taken that line always with Bronson. I think we ought to put our foot down—"

She said: "Oh, well, it isn't as if he was going to be here for good. He's—just sort of visiting. And when he's so sweet about so many things, why start—you know we'd have a time

—a sort of row, maybe—I don't know what—if we tried to make him do anything he didn't really want to. And, anyway, I insist I was in the wrong. Under the circumstances, I really hadn't any right to say what I did. He probably feels that—I haven't very much sympathy with—his other home."

"Doesn't matter what he thinks. He can't go about banging doors in your face."

"After all, doors aren't anything much. Didn't you ever slam a door when you were a boy?"

"Me! You *know* I didn't! Can you see a child slamming a door in my mother's face?"

Emily shrugged. "Well, anyway, even with your mother, I don't suppose you always were a model of manners. Besides, manners don't count with children. It's more a question of their impulses, their nature, whether they have generous impulses, and affections, and all that."

"I remember you said you couldn't endure those Phelan boys because they were so ill-mannered."

"Oh, but that's altogether a different thing, as I was trying to tell you." Suddenly she cut the string of the parcel she had been tying up, and put it on the table, and turned earnestly to Jim.

"Of course, he *is* rude at times. I'm not saying he isn't. I'm only saying that, no matter what he does, I just *love* that boy, Jim. I really have a sort of overflowing affection for him, an impulse to overlook whatever he does, because some way, after all, he is a very dear, sweet boy. Isn't he, now?"

"Emily, you make me ashamed of myself half a dozen times a day. Nobody could have managed him as you do. Nobody would have overlooked so much!"

"I can't help it. That's just the way I feel. Honestly. I

think he's just worth doing anything for, Jim." They were standing on opposite sides of the living-room table; a bouquet of larkspur was between them.

"But I can't do anything for him! I can't—speak to him—intimately. I've *lost* him, Emily!"

He hadn't meant to cry out that way, confessing his defeat, begging for her pity.

"Oh, *Jim!*" she cried.

At the tender passion of her voice the value of the world shifted and changed. He shut his eyes. He was only a wound, and she was the healing of it. He was exhaustion, and she was rest. He was disappointment, and she was the only possible satisfaction. He wanted nothing but that tenderness of hers around him. He wanted to lie down and rest forever in that love of hers. He was leaning toward her, across the table, his hands holding the sides of it, stretching out the arms of his soul to her, his eyes shut, for a long reckless time—

"There they are for dinner now!" he heard her say, awakening him.

He opened his eyes. He saw them. He heard them. Bob and his son, strong, noisy, happy, coming into the house, ready to eat. "Damn them! Damn everything!" "You can't kiss me *now,* Jim!" this woman had been saying to him intermittently for years. That was his fate.

He looked at her. She was turning away to hide her tears.

"How're you to-day, old boy?" Bob was asking.

"Rotten!" he growled. He sat there with his eyes shut. He shrank from going in to dinner with them. He wanted to shriek. "I'm going crazy," he thought, desperately. He tried to pull himself together. He didn't dare to leave them, to go to his room. He went into the dining room. He sat there

at the table, with his brother, with the woman's husband, with his son, with her daughter. Some way he heard them talking, as if they were together in a nightmare. "I'll clear out of this," he steadied himself by vowing. "I won't stay near her. She's Bob's. I could get well with Emily. I could be a man again if I could have her. I could live. She's Bob's. I got to pull myself together. If she would speak to me that way, I'd be a well man!"

That afternoon, as he lay on his bed, he saw the whole situation with the clearness of despair. There was one woman in the world he needed to live. If he could have Emily's arms about him, her fingers in his hair, his head on her shoulder, he could begin again. Life would be possible. He who had never been happy could be happy there. But he couldn't have her. Never. Whether he lived or died, he couldn't have her. She was his brother's, and there was no use asking himself whether, to save himself, he would have cast his brother mercilessly out, if he had had the chance—whether he would have been capable of usurping his royal prerogative of love. He would never need to settle that question. Emily would settle that. Emily was true to Bob—as true as steel. That was why a man might naturally covet her, a woman too remote from baseness to consider it.

"The only thing for me to do," said Jim Kenworthy, "is to get out of this. I ought never to have come. I ought to have had more sense. I just let myself go because I wasn't well and deliberately came out here to be near her. I got to get out of this." But since he wanted to stay near her, he thought of good reasons for doing so. What could he do with the boy? Where would he go with him? The boy was happier here with Bob and her than he would be any place else. The boy would be as distant to his father in any other place. "I'll never get him back,"

said Jim, bitterly. "I've lost him. I could get him back if I had her. She's got hold of him. He'll never be the same to me that he was when we were together, when he was little. I never thought I'd lose him this way. Well, I've finished losing. I've lost my health. I've lost my practice. I've lost him. Emily I lost first of all. There's nothing more to lose, at least."

Emily went to her room after dinner, and shut the door, and sat down quietly, to try to think. She had never felt so sorry for anyone in her life as she felt for Jim. She wished she might take him in her arms and kiss him again and again for every wound that wretched boy's hatred had inflicted upon him. She remembered his face at dinner, and she longed to pour out all the caresses of her being upon him.

"He's sick," she told herself. "He's ghastly. But this boy is the climax, the worst of all. He didn't want anything but the boy. And see what he got! This is breaking his heart. There's nothing I can do. I'd like to whip that boy! I'd like to beat him! I've talked to him of Jim. I've done all I can. And he won't appreciate him. It's killing Jim! His face at dinner! Oh, if I might comfort him! He's stood the loss of everything. But he can't stand this alienation from the boy! Only three weeks more left of him. Oh, if something would only happen to make them friends. Something—I don't know —Jim isn't himself, but he's so pitiful I should think that little brute would see through him. Three weeks more. And then months of separation, and no letters. No wonder he's sick at heart. Oh, why does dear, lovely Jim have to suffer this way? Why couldn't he have had a son that would be a pleasure to him? Oh, it seems to me I would give everything in the world if I could make that boy like Jim—treat him with a little affection! But what can I do?"

She asked herself that question unavailingly all the afternoon. She could do nothing but redouble her tenderness to Jim, and her patience with his horrid boy. "If I'm not careful, I'll jump up and give him a shaking the next time he snubs Jim!" she murmured.

Bob, too, realized that the boy wasn't polite to his father. But Bob was infatuated with Bronson—just infatuated. Always telling Jim something new about him. Always delighting in his exploits. That very evening he burst out, before Bronson had got as far as the river on his way to the swimming hole:

"Gee! I wish you'd been down at the garage this afternoon, Jim! You'd ought to have seen that kid! Kennedy came in, with a whole crowd following after him. He draws as many kids as a circus parade, with that aviation uniform. All the work stopped. Everyone gathered around him, shaking hands with him. And Bronson, too. Asking him about everything. American planes and English and French. He's some talker, I'll say. And he got to telling about ailerons. On Havilands. And all of a sudden Bronson just flatly contradicted him. Not sassy or anything, but as if he was giving him some information. But everybody was sort of taken back for a minute, especially Kennedy. And he says to him, joking, 'Well, if you know so much about it, you might draw me a diagram.' And Bronson never saw he was kidding him. He says, 'I can't draw very well, but I'll show you how it is.' And, by jiminy! he drew a diagram! You ought to have seen Kennedy's eyes bulge out. And he started in to quiz the kid. There wasn't a thing he didn't ask him! Look at this! I went and got him a big paper!" And Bob unfolded beneath his reading lamp a large piece of wrapping paper, covered with rude sketches, whose meaning Emily couldn't even imagine. "Look at that, now. You could

have heard a pin drop while they all watched him. He was at that old high desk. And they were all standing watching him. And he went right on drawing, his tongue out like this." Bob showed how Bronson's tongue came out of the corner of his mouth when he grew studious. "By golly! It made me think of the boy Jesus in the temple, that picture, the way they all stood there watching him thinking." And Emily, moved by Bob's surprising emotion, suddenly visualized the whitewashed interior of the garage, and the crowd watching the huge, fair-haired, earnest child drawing at the rough desk in one corner, and the aviator looking over his shoulder. And Bob began again:

"All our men were waiting to see what Kennedy would say. They all feel as if the kid belongs to them. And there was a man there waiting for his car to get fixed, a classy little car from Ohio, dolled up with the most silly millionaire beauty-parlor tricks I ever saw on a decent car. And he stood there watching with the rest, smoking. I guess he thought he'd come across a genius in the wild West, for he says, 'Where'd you learn all this, my boy?' as if he'd been king of England. Bronson never looked at him. He just says, 'My chauffeur taught me,' and went on drawing. The men all snickered. And the guy says, 'Must have been some chauffeur.' And Bronson says, 'The best in the city.' And he says, 'What city?' He didn't know what he was getting into. Bronson turned around and looked at him as if he'd been a beetle. You ought to have seen that stare. He says, 'New York City.' And that guy simply faded out. I didn't blame him. And Kennedy says, 'Who is this boy, anyway, Bob?' And I said: 'That's *Jim's* boy! Didn't you get that? He's only fourteen, too,' I said. 'I told you when you came in that was Jim's boy!' You ought to have seen Ken-

nedy look! He couldn't believe it. He said it wasn't possible! 'Can't imagine old Jim having a boy like that! He's beat us all to that!' he says. Kennedy's only married now. You know *him,* Jim. And he sort of started to shake hands with Bronson. And then—I don't know what came over him. Bronson just—Well, I do get mad at that kid sometimes. He—all of a sudden he began to blush and wouldn't speak to him, or anything, and backed away, and he went and crawled under his car and went to work! You know, I wished he hadn't done that with *Kennedy.* But, anyway, he saw all right what kind of a kid he is. He said he was coming up to see you before he leaves, Jim. He's only got a couple of days more here. I bet you he never saw a fourteen-year-old kid with a head on him like that lad!"

Emily wanted to look at Jim, but she didn't dare. She waited for his comment, but none came.

"By golly!" Bob exclaimed, after a minute. "I'd give half I possess to know what that boy'll be twenty years from now!"

"Twenty years from now!" Emily repeated slowly. And to herself she said, "There's no saying what he'll be like to-morrow morning!" Then, "Bob, what are all those drawings of?"

"You wouldn't understand, Emily. But you ought to have seen Kennedy look at him! It'll be a long time before he forgets Bronson, you bet!"

Chapter Fifteen

THE next afternoon Emily, having left the telephone stand, sat down idly on the Sheraton sofa in the living room to wait her long-distance call. She was thinking, of course, of Jim—and thinking of him meant pitying him, nowadays,—when he came into the room from the hall. She smiled up at him and he sat down beside her. She had on a sheer, soft white dress. And almost before she realized what had happened, Jim laid his head down on her shoulder and began kissing her neck.

She sat still.

The phone rang.

Still she sat there. His arms were around her. It was a timeless moment. He heard her say gently, moving away from him:

"Now that was scarcely a brotherly thing to do, Jimmy."

She went to the phone. It didn't seem to be working right. She couldn't hear for the confusion within her. "I can't hear," she stood saying, "I can't hear!"

Jim had rushed out of the room. He had left the house, in the direction of the river. Her undisturbed comment on his passion had knocked the very foundation from under his mood. He went falling, floundering through the shame she had conjured up around him. He had insulted a good woman. Had he imagined that Emily was going to let him kiss her? He must have been mad not to know better than that! He had dared to imagine her solicitude for his comfort, her tenderness to the boy, had sprung from emotions not really sisterly, something not for Bob's sake. Well, he had found out! He had

got what he deserved! "Scarcely a brotherly thing to do!" Eating his brother's bread, depending upon his charity, kissing his brother's wife. "I wasn't myself!" he cried. "I never would have done that if I'd been myself! I haven't ever done it before, all these years." Had he expected for a minute Emily would encourage his advances, as the boy's mother had encouraged her lover's? "I didn't mean to do that. I didn't think of doing it. I couldn't help it when she looked at me that way!" And she had called him Jimmy, his mother's name for him, for the first time in her life, unconsciously appealing to his mother to defend her against his intentions. "Now that was scarcely a brotherly thing to do, Jimmy!" The words cut through him every time he thought of them. There was nothing left to him to do now, in decency, but to get away from her. He would have to plan that. He got into the boat which Bob had got for the boy, and drifted down to a pasture and lay there, in the shade, all the afternoon.

And Emily, when she had hung up the receiver, went to her room, and shut the door, and sat down, and said to herself:

"I'm a bad woman. I'm a contemptible woman. I've been wanting Jim to do that all summer. And now he's done it. Because he's sick, and nervous, and too ill to care what he does, too tired to be able to help himself. All summer I've been waiting for that. I've been dressing for Jim. I bought this dress for him. It's too thin. It isn't decent, if it is the style. I've been kind to the boy for his sake. I've been playing with him. He knows that. Poor old sweet Jim! I'll never speak that way to him again. If ever he kisses me again— But he never will. He'll go away to-night or to-morrow. He won't stay here. He isn't strong enough to stay in this house with me. I didn't suppose he would come, in the first place. He

came for the boy, because this was a good place for the boy. He didn't suppose he'd lose control of himself that way. He'll leave now. He won't stay. Where'll he go? Oh, why couldn't I behave myself? Jim can't go any place else. What can he do, with that boy? He's too weak to travel. It's too hot. I ought to go away. I'll go to Chicago. I'll go to my dentist there. And I'll find a reason for staying a week or two. He can rest here, in this house, where he'll be comfortable. It would have been better if he had never come. Oh, why is life like this? Why must it make the sweetest things wrong, put the best things where we can't reach them? Why should a few little silly boy and girl minutes, like those when we quarreled, have power to determine so many years? If I could have him in my hand even now, I could make him live. I could make him sing. I could make him a king again, gloating! Why must Bob be here? Why must Bob be here between us. And the children. We can't shut our eyes to the truth. We have to face the facts—the music. We could never have each other without having Bob there to reproach us. That's life; that's our fate. Jim can suffer; he can die, before my eyes. I can watch him, but I can't comfort him, I can't love him, I can't look at him. I can't stay in the same house with him and not play with his love. I'm too terrible. I'm a bad woman."

And so she debated, and wept bitterly in her soul. But that she might have her desire dishonorably, that she might give her love secretly to the lover who needed her, never even then occurred to her. She wasn't that sort.

Bob came down to supper from Jim's room that evening, disturbed. As soon as it was over and he got a chance to speak to her out of the children's hearing, he said, worriedly:

"He feels too tired to eat. And what do you suppose he's

taken into his head to do? He's crazy. He says he's going to take the kid and go fishing! In his state! I tried to persuade him. I said I'd take the kid there. But I see what's eating him, all right. It's the way the kid treats him. I'm going to give that boy a good talking to. He's got to stop this. He treats Jim as if he was a stranger and I was his father. Jim ain't sore at us, or anything, of course. He told me that. But he says he's got to get the boy off some place where he can get acquainted with him."

"I see that, Bob. I understand how he feels."

"Yes, but look here. What'll happen when he gets up there? The kid won't go, in the first place. And if he does, he won't behave. He'll act wild, maybe. You talk to him, Emily. You tell him he's crazy. Maybe he'll listen to you."

"Oh, Bob, I don't want to talk to him about it! I'm so sorry! I wish that boy would behave himself. You talk to *him,* Bob, and so will I. You say you'll just be disgusted with him if he doesn't go and act decent to Jim. I'd just like to shake him!"

"Ye-ah! So'll Jim like to shake him! And what'll happen then? He might knock him down, Emily. And, anyway, Jim's in no shape to go fishing. It isn't as if there was a hotel there. He says he's going to the old hut. He says he's written Davis to see if he can have it."

Emily sighed.

"Well, I don't know what to say, Bob. But let *me* suggest it to Bronson. Let me tell him about it. I want to have a talk with him. He's just got to quit that!"

"Ye-ah. You talk to him. So'll I. But this is a crazy scheme. I told Jim so. I don't like it a little bit!"

They were bold enough in their suggestions about the boy when he wasn't there, but when they were sitting with him on

the porch (Jim had stayed in his room), they approached the subject reluctantly. Emily screwed up her courage and began, after putting him in a good humor:

"Your father wants to go on a fishing trip, Bronson."

"Does he?" he asked, indifferently. "What's he want fish for? You get good steaks here."

Bob chuckled. He agreed wholly with the boy. "People who like fishing don't fish for the fish, kiddo," he said. "Jim was always dippy about fishing there. Maybe you'd like it."

"Who? Me? Huh!"

"He wants you to go with him, Bronson," Emily went on. "He isn't very well here. That place would be good for him, we think. It would be a good change for him. And it would be awfully nice for you to go and sort of take care of him. That would give him more satisfaction than anything else."

Bronson sat up in his chair suspiciously.

"Me?" he demanded. "*I'm* not going fishing. I'm going to stay here."

"It's a swell place," Bob hurried to add. "You'll be crazy about it. Your dad used to go up there every few weeks all the season when he lived in Chicago. My mother and father lived there, too, once when they were first married."

Bronson had become interested.

"Did he?" he asked, thoughtfully, and then suddenly: "Why, *I* remember that! He used to bring home great big long fish. I remember once he took me down to see them in a basket of ice. Great big funny mouths they had. I remember that." It was the first time he had spoken naturally of his father all the summer. Emily was delighted with the chance.

She spoke of the attractions of the place, of swimming and boating, and motor racing, and yacht races on the big lake, and

the best fishing in the country on the small one. Jim had once owned a little hut there with some cronies of his. But she wasn't successful. Bob saw the boy was bored with the idea. He remarked, slyly:

"I thought maybe you would like to drive through, kiddo. I thought your dad could go on the night boat up from Chi, and I'd drive over with you and bring the car back."

"Are you coming, auntie?"

"No, I'm not going with you. It's more a man's place, Bronson. But I don't know anything I'd like so well as to have you go with your father. You could carry the water and the butter and things up from the spring house at the foot of the bluff. It's such a nice place, Bronson—"

"How long do I have to stay?" he consented to inquire, uneasily, at length.

"Oh, not long!" Bob assured him. "I bet we could make it in two days, if we hit it up. I'd like to shut Brown up. He made it in three days, and has bragged about it ever since. Calendar took three days and a half to it." Bob was wily. He had played his last card.

"Will you let me drive all the way, if I go?"

"Sure! If you can keep up the pace!"

"When do we start?" asked Bronson.

Chapter Sixteen

The fishing hut is a little screened box of a thing above which dune oaks crowdedly contend and stretch up higher and higher to find space in the blue sky for their delicate branching. Forty feet in front of it one comes to the sheer edge of the bluff and looks down over what was once a mighty river. The fury and the passion of its current chose another channel years ago, leaving this one to die slowly in its memories. Directly below one, where the pier and the spring house are, flows a narrow blue stream in which little weeds along the bank pulsate in the water so gently, so languidly, that one could imagine any beat of it was the last one. And beyond the little stream, to almost the whole great width of the old bed, stretches what Jim's mother as a bride called her garden of wild rice. "In June, I think that must be the greenest place in the world," he remembered her saying. Impenetrably thick, balking even water that would try to push through it, it waves and nods and ripens, welcoming to its reedy fastnesses herons and ducks and red-winged blackbirds. Beyond this, against the further bank, a pine-grown dune of mournful green, creeps another slow stream. At one's right, all this comes into sight suddenly and magnificently, around a curve from a tangled forest. And at one's left it is devoured presently, all that green and weedy languor, by the blackish-green whirling and torrent of the main river.

When Jim got there, Bob and the boy had the necessary supplies laid in and the hut in order. The milk and the butter and the cold chicken were in the spring house, ready for supper.

Emily had insisted on sending with them a great bundle of fresh linen. "It doesn't matter at all if you do lose some of them. They're old things!" she told Jim. But she had counted them out carefully to Bronson, making him keeper of them. So the cots on the screened sleeping porch were made up white and inviting when Jim arrived. She had sent a supply of the jams Bronson liked, and had instructed Bob to stop in Chicago and buy all the technical magazines the boy had missed. ("Gee! this is a jay town! Nothing but story magazines!" he had complained once. "Why don't they have any true magazines here?") There was reading matter enough of his kind to keep him from getting savagely bored. And he was tired from the ride.

"The kid *must* be tired," Bob assured Jim. "He says he isn't, but, by heck! he *must* be! I never feel like an old man till I get with him. Thirty miles an hour we made, yesterday, and when you think of the roads and the détours, that's not bad, I'll tell the world. The old bus did us proud, I'll say. But I ain't as young as I once was. I feel like I'd like to take the night boat back. The kid don't stop for anything when he gets started once. I got used to driving sort of gentle for Emily. I'm shaken up. He *must* be tired!"

That first afternoon and evening weren't so bad. Jim slept, to his surprise, till supper time. The boy was interested casually in getting the supper, and fell asleep at once, after eating, stretched out on his cot on the porch. And Jim sat and smoked, watching him, wondering, dreading his responsibility for the days that were coming, thinking of Emily, thankful at least that he had got away from that house, ashamed of himself altogether.

The second day the effect of Emily's instructions began to wear off. Bronson was less polite. He was "grouchy." However, he absented himself all the afternoon, and Jim judged from

what he said, when he got back in the twilight, that he had been tinkering with the motor boat of a man who had a hut down the river. He caught a fish the second day. But in the third day's fishing he didn't, for some reason, get a bite, although Jim caught three good ones. He sat in the boat, watching his father sulkily. Jim felt the storm in him coming on. He felt his utter helplessness. He knew he was too nervous, too readily excited, to meet it.

They had rowed in the evening sunset back to the pier and landed with their fish. They took the little path which led a few steps from the spring house to the irregular steps which were cut out of the side of the bluff. Bronson was walking ahead, wearing defiantly the bathing suit which he had worn for two whole days. It was a short black garment with a wide emerald-green stripe around his waist, which somewhat made his thin, long arms look thinner and his long, scrawny legs look most childishly awkward. Suddenly he stopped, with a warning to his father to be still. In the path before them was a wild-wood mating.

They waited till it was over. When they went on, Jim, with a pang of pity for the keenness of the boy's interest in it, said something about the necessity for the regulation of the instinct in society, some old platitude which he thought properly paternal. And the lad, with a snarl, opened his soft young mouth and brought out of it a reply so shockingly improper about his mother, that Jim's hand went out instinctively in a flash of anger and seized him by the arm.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" he cried. "I'm *ashamed* of you! Saying a thing like that! My own son!"

Instantly the boy turned upon him, shaking himself loose. He stood bending over Jim, threateningly, from the first step,

and he cried, in a rage: "Your own son! How do you *know* I'm your own son?"

Jim had shrunk back from the danger of him. They stood glaring at each other. The boy shouted again:

"How do you *know* I'm your own son?"

It was the roar of a dam breaking.

Before that voice Jim's anger vanished.

"What's the matter, Bronson?" he cried, rushing to the rescue of this suffering person as he would have rushed to rescue a man crushed beneath a stone. "What's the matter?" he cried again.

"I say, how do you *know* I'm your own son?"

"What do you mean?"

"Maybe I'm Veile's son! How do you *know?*"

Jim was too dazed to answer. "Why, Bronson!" he muttered. "What—what an *idea!*"

"Tell me how you know!" roared the boy. His face was white.

"Well—what—how does *anybody* know?" Jim babbled.

"That's what I'm asking you. I say, how do you *know* if I'm your son or not?"

"Why, I never doubted it! I know it—by faith!"

"What faith? What's that?"

"My faith in your mother."

"She's a liar!"

"Bronson!"

"She's a liar, I say! Isn't there any way you can *tell?*"

"Why, Bronson, that's the way I tell! That's what marriage is, you know. We promised—to each other you know—that, forsaking all others—to cleave to each other—"

"Aw"—it was a heartbreaking wail—"tell me the *truth!*

Ain't there some way at the time—so you can tell—so you knew then—when—you made me—whether I'm your son or not?"

"My dear boy, I *am* telling you the truth. I say I knew only because I trusted your mother. There isn't any other way!"

"Aw, I thought *you* knew! Bill said maybe I wasn't your son, anyway! And I said I was, *too.* And he said I didn't know for sure. He said *nobody* knew. I said *you* knew! I said *my father* knew. And he *smiled!* And now you say you *don't* know!"

"I did *not* say I didn't know! I said I *did* know!"

"You did not! You said you *didn't* know!"

"I said I knew by the faith I had in your mother. I said—"

"Oh, don't kid me! That ain't anything! Don't kid me!"

"It *is* something. A woman's—honor *is* something. Why, it's all we've got to identify ourselves in the world! I never doubted for a moment whose son I was in my life!"

Bronson sank down abruptly on the steps. "You just *lie* to me," he wailed. "You just think I'm a kid."

Jim sat down next to him and, without realizing what he did, put his arm around the boy's bare legs.

"Look here," he pleaded. "I'm not lying to you! I'm not a liar. You've got to cut that word out if you expect me to talk to you. I'm telling you the truth. I said I never in the world doubted for a minute whose son *I* am. Never! And you are the first one who ever suggested such a thing to me!"

The bitterness of his father's voice seemed to have effect. The boy lifted his head and sat peering down into his face as if his life depended on what he saw there.

"Why didn't you?" he cried, bewildered.

"Why should I? If you had known my mother— Look

here, Bronson. Who is this Bill? What's he been telling you? A nice sort of person for you to be with!"

Bronson's temper flared anew, and high. "Bill's all right," he cried. "Bill's a good sport. He's my friend."

"But—but how did he happen to say such a thing to you?" Jim asked, cautiously.

"He said to me, 'What you always trying to run away for?' I was locked up, and he came in—he got in and talked to me! 'Why don't you want to stay here where you belong?' he said to me. 'Veile's all right,' he says. 'Maybe *he's* your father, for all you know,' he says. 'You quit running away,' he says to me."

"But how do you mean—he came to your room. I thought—he was the chauffeur?"

"I was locked up, and he came—"

"What do you mean, locked up?"

"I was locked up in a room till I would apologize. I knocked a tooth out of Veile, and I—"

"Bronson!"

"I did! I knocked a front *tooth* out of him! I wish I'd pounded him to jelly! But the butler—"

"Bronson!"

"Well, I did. He laid for me. He had some old chipping chairs from the ark, and I kicked them over when I got a chance. He hid them in our hall and he laid for me. I knocked a tooth out of him. 'Take your old stuff and get out of my father's house,' I said to—"

"Bronson! That wasn't *my* house! That was your mo—"

"It was, *too,* your house!" retorted young Hamlet, passionately. "Why wasn't it your house if it was *my* house? They locked me up, then, but I'd knocked his front tooth—"

"You deserved it!"

"I did *not!* I had to stay there three months! And nobody ever came to see me but Bill! I couldn't have anything to eat, but he brought me everything. He had a key. The maids were afraid to come in with their dirty old soups and stuff. They hurried when they went down the hall past my door, even. I heard them."

"Bronson!"

"Well, they did. I heard them. But Bill came to see me. He brought me things to eat—steaks and things. And after a while he got me out so I could go down to his shop sometimes."

"Why, my dear boy!"

"Ye-ah! That's what they done to me! And one night I was down there—(Bill taught me everything; he knows everything)—and he was having a row with some maid. She was fired and she was mad. And when I went in she was just hollering and yelling, and she sees me first, and he says—he says to her, 'Well, if you don't want trouble, what do you go crawling round into men's beds for?' And she seen me coming and she says, 'If I crawled round into as many men's beds as that young swell's mother——' "

"Bronson! Leave that out!"

The flood never paused for the twig in its course.

"And Bill yelled at her to shut up, and she wouldn't, and he put his hand over her mouth and got her up against the wall, and he yelled at me to clear out of there. I didn't want to stay, anyway. I felt funny!"

"Oh, Bronson! People like that—"

"Bill's all right! He's my friend. And afterward he came up to my room and he says to me, 'Don't you cry,' he says to me. 'She's hard boiled,' he says, 'and you can't believe a word she says,' he says. 'She never would have got into the house if it

hadn't been for the war.' But I *knew,* then. I knew before, but not clear. He couldn't fool me. And he says it wasn't anything, anyway. 'They're all like that,' he says. 'Everybody's doing it,' he says, 'and the rich ones get away with it, and the poor ones get fired,' he says—"

"Bronson!"

"Then I ran away. I got to—"

"You ran away!"

"Of *course* I ran away! Did you think I wanted to stay there? I got to Albany, and they got me and locked me up; and I told Bill I wanted to get out and go to you, and he said I couldn't go. I got to stay there, he said, and for me not to worry, and maybe Veile was my father, anyway, and for me not to make a fuss about it. And how did I know who was my father, he says. And I said you *did* know. And now you say you don't!"

"I did *not* say I didn't know! I said I did know! Get that through your head right now! I said I trusted your mother. Can't you—"

"She's a liar!"

"Bronson!"

"Well, you know she is. She promised you—she wouldn't do that. And then she went and did! She fooled you!"

"Bronson, you don't understand. If you'll be patient, I'll explain how it was. Your mother and I (you can't judge these things fairly yet) we were never—very well suited to each other. It was—unfortunate. And she was perfectly—honest about it. When—she found—she didn't want to—live with me any longer, she told me frankly—and we were divorced. Our marriage was over—legally. And she married—your stepfather. She—"

"Stepfather!" roared the boy. "He's no kind of a father of mine! I'll tell you that right now! I'll kill him if he's my father! And, anyway, she *did* fool you. Wasn't he there all the time you were away? I know *that,* too. I heard a maid say the devil would be to pay when the boy understands what's going on. She didn't do what she said she would. She fooled you!"

"My dear boy, I wish—"

"And when Bill said maybe you weren't my father, I knew why you didn't come for me—why you didn't come to steal me away. I thought *you* thought so, too. And when I came out here, you *said* so. You said—"

"Bronson, I never said any such a thing!"

"You *did.* You said so, that first day. I thought I'd just come out and see you, see if you wanted me. I felt—lonely. And when I saw you there in the station, in Chicago, I *felt* as if I was your boy. And then you said I wasn't!"

"Why, Bronson, I did not! What ever put that idea into your head?"

"Why, Aunt Emily said the first thing that I was like you, like that picture of your mother. And I asked you, and you said *no!* You said—I was like *her!*"

"But, my dear child, you must have known what I meant! I meant that you look like your mother's people! I never imagined what you were supposing—"

"And you didn't come and steal me!"

"But, Bronson, you knew the courts had given you to your mother! You *knew* that! I told you. What could I do?"

"But I'd read about it in the paper every day! Every day I read about somebody who came and stole their children. Or even

women come and kidnap them because they're theirs and they want them!"

"But, my dear boy, *I'm* not a criminal. *I'm* not a kidnapper! I couldn't *steal* you! That never entered my head. It would have been useless! And criminal, I tell you!"

"But if you had wanted me bad, if I was yours, you could have come and stole me!"

"I could *not* have done any such a thing. It would have been —breaking the law."

"Well, but you would have had me!"

"But I couldn't *steal* you. I'd have been a thief!"

"But if I wanted anything bad, I'd take it."

"You'd be a thief if you did." Jim was speaking sharply.

"Maybe I would. But I'd have what I wanted. I wouldn't mind!"

"Bronson!" The terrible thing was that Jim believed he had made an accurate statement about himself.

"I just waited and *waited* for you to come. But you didn't."

"But you *knew* I was doing what I could, legally. You *knew* I wanted you. I explained that to you."

"Yes. I thought you must. Bill said—"

"Bronson, tell me this. Why were you with this Bill all the time? Didn't you have a tutor?"

"Tutor!" The boy's whole face relaxed. He almost chuckled. "I bet I had a hundred. They didn't stay. They said I was the worst boy they ever saw. They called me a fiend. You bet I was, too." And over the passionate face there came the reminiscent smile of a general thinking of great victories. It was plain that his life hadn't all been unhappy. "But I *liked* Bill!"

"But—he was—a chauffeur!"

"He was just a kind of a chauffeur. He wears men's clothes

most of the time, and he runs everything. He tells everybody in the house where they get off!"

"Men's clothes!"

"He don't wear a uniform except sometimes. He tells them all where to get off. He does—business and things—for Veile. He *likes* Veile. But, anyway, he's all right. He said for me to come out here and see you. I might *like* you, he said, like I did him. He said not to run away till I'd seen you!"

"Well, that was kind of him, I'm sure!"

"Sure. Bill's great."

The boy's loyalty made Jim's irony futile.

"And that's why I locked up the bathroom on the train. I told Bill I wouldn't run away till I'd seen you, but I had to have some fun out of that old policeman. He needn't think he can fool with me!"

"Bronson! Why—"

"Well, he just came along to see I didn't run away. Old pig!"

"But look here—"

"I wanted to see what you'd do with me. And I saw there wasn't any place in that house to lock me up. Aunt Emily said they didn't even lock the doors sometimes. I thought I'd stay, even if you did say that. And, anyway, Aunt Emily said I *was* your boy. She said that at first, and afterwards she said I wasn't."

"You misunderstand everything, with that idea in your head! She couldn't possibly have said that. She didn't mean anything like that."

"I asked her—she said I was a good boy. And afterwards I asked her why she thought that. And she said, 'Well, your father's son would just naturally be a good boy, wouldn't he?' And then I knew I wasn't yours. Maybe I was Veile's. And

some people would say I looked like you, and some said I didn't. The man in the drug store with the bulldogs, he said I was like Uncle Bob. And Uncle Bob said I was a Kenworthy, all right. That meant I *was* your boy. But you said, 'He seems to be.' That meant I wasn't *really!* And that man with the oldest Ford said I was like *you.* And Mr. Paltzer, he said I was like your mother, and so did lots more people. And that old woman who used to know you when you were little, Uncle Bob stopped in there one day to have me visit her, she said I was just like your father. And I thought it was funny afterwards, the way she was kind of feeling me, and I asked Uncle Bob, and he said, yes, she was *blind!* And then the aviator said I wasn't your son. He said I couldn't *possibly* be yours!" His voice suddenly choked and he sobbed.

"My dear boy! Bronson! Let me explain to you. They didn't mean anything! Nothing you thought they meant! People simply do that when they are interested in your family, when they knew a generation or two of it. They do it without—meaning anything serious. Some people see one likeness, and some see another! Kennedy didn't mean you weren't my son. He meant—"

"He said, 'It isn't *possible* that's Jim's boy!' That's just what he said!"

"But, good Heavens! Can't you see that if he had meant that, that if he had ever thought about the possibility of that, he never would have said such a thing in such a place? You know—a friend of mine—never would have said such a thing before you if it could have been taken seriously. He only meant it seemed such a little time since we were little duffers ourselves, playing ball, that he couldn't realize I had such—a grown-up son! That's all he meant!"

"But you said, yourself, you didn't know. You said—what you said wasn't anything!"

"I said I had perfect confidence in your mother, and that's everything."

"You know she's a liar. She goes around crawling into—"

"Bronson, I forbid you to say that! I forbid you to use that absurd phrase again!"

"If she can do it, I guess I can say it!"

"No, you can't! It doesn't matter what your mother does, you can't speak of her that way! With such hate! It isn't decent!"

"Neither is she."

"Well, you've got to be."

"Why have I? Ain't I her son?"

"You're my son, too. And I can't—speak that way—about her."

"You don't know I'm—" The boy stopped speaking, wearily, bitterly.

Jim woke up from the trance in which he had been sitting, his face near the distorted face of the boy. He realized he had been stroking his great, bony leg, patting him. He saw that darkness was falling about them, that they were swarmed upon by mosquitoes. His yearning for his son was like a pain through his body, a pain sharpened by helplessness.

"Let's go up to the house," he said. "Let's leave the fish here for morning. We won't cook them to-night."

Inside the protecting screens, Jim set the electric lantern on the supper table and cut the delicious salt-rising bread they had brought, with their other provisions, from the farmhouse where they took their dinners. He set out the cold chicken and the raspberries. Bronson came bringing up the pail of rich

milk, and the butter from the spring house below. They took their seats on opposite sides of the little table.

"Have some meat?" said Jim.

"Don't want any."

"Want some jam for your bread?"

"I don't want any bread."

Jim tried to eat. Every time he looked at the boy he saw his suspicious, longing, pained eyes fixed upon him, puzzling over his face, trying to understand him. He said gently:

"Bronson, drink some milk."

The boy drank a mouthful. He set the glass down and, leaning on his elbows half across the table, continued to peer at Jim, with his head stretched forward.

Jim met his eyes.

He said, gently, "What's the matter?"

The boy shifted uneasily. His feet crowded against his father's under the table. He settled down again, leaning back in his chair, his long, bony arms hanging limply beside him.

"I thought you knew," he said. His lips quivered.

"But, Bronson, you're acting—you're making yourself wretched over nothing! I've told you the truth. If *I'm* satisfied, *you* ought to be. Do you suppose that if I thought you weren't my son, if I'd ever thought that, I should ever have loved you so much? Do you suppose I should have made such an effort to —get you for this summer?"

"Did you—love me?" He was leaning forward, across the table again, though he proposed to go cautiously among unmanly emotions.

"Did I *love* you! What do you suppose I've been living for? What do you suppose I've been thinking of? I thought the time—"

"What *were* you thinking of?"

"Of *you! My son!* Of course! I couldn't sleep for thinking of you, for expecting you. I counted the days—"

"But you never came for me! You never stole me away!"

"I've explained that to you. I've told you why. I couldn't do that. I'm not that kind of man!"

"Why not?" The child was bewildered and wistful.

Jim went over all that again, the two of them sitting leaning across the table, their faces burning with earnestness. "I tell you I'm a law-abiding man," he declared. "You might have remembered how I used to look after you, how I used to tell you stories!"

"I did. I thought of that. You took me to the circus, didn't you? You taught me to swim. You used to play ball with me. Veile never did anything for me. He never liked me. He told me to get out of the way."

"Why, Bronson! In those days—"

"I wanted *you* for my father. I didn't want that old, dirty booze-fighter."

"If you'll listen to me for a moment, I'll tell you something! Your mother didn't even *know* that man in those days. She'd never seen—"

"How do you know she didn't? You weren't there all the time."

"Well, I haven't any reason to suppose she did, and every reason to suppose she didn't! We lived in Chicago. And he was a New-Yorker. I never had any reason to doubt your mother —in those days!"

The boy laughed. Any words, any comment would have been easier to answer than that laugh.

"Don't do that!"

"What?"

"Don't laugh that way. Don't think such things. Somebody has put most unfortunate ideas into your head. That man Bill, I wish you had never seen him!"

"Oh, you *do!*" The boy straightened up defiantly. "I suppose you wish I didn't have any friends at all. Who'd I have to talk to? I told you Bill was straight! He makes me behave."

"He *does!*"

"Sure he does. He's the best friend I ever had. 'You keep away from them,' he says to me. 'They're a bad lot,' he says. 'And the more money you have, the worse they are. Don't you have anything to do with them,' he says!"

"That's exactly what I object to. That's what he oughtn't to have told you. Because it isn't true. If some of them are—bad, that doesn't prove anything. It doesn't prove they are *all* bad. There's your aunt," Jim added, naturally thinking first of her when he sought for an example to prove his point. "There's your aunt Emily."

He saw he had scored for the first time. Bronson blinked. His surprise grew. He didn't know what to say. He couldn't adjust her, the thought of her, to his bitter convictions.

"Of course, there's Aunt Emily," he murmured, after a few seconds, thoughtfully, lamely.

"Well, there's lots more like her. Thousands of them."

"She's different," the lad murmured. *"She's* straight, all right."

Then Jim, a lawyer, saw his argument. "What makes you think she is?"

Bronson's eyes narrowed suspiciously again. "What makes me think what?"

"What makes you think your aunt—is 'straight'?"

The boy glared across at him, too puzzled to answer, threateningly.

"You don't know a thing about her," Jim continued, slyly. "How do you know whether she's—straight or not?" He saw him grow red with anger.

"Cut it out!" he growled.

"You don't *know* anything about her. You just saw her, and you think she's straight, as you say. You haven't any proof that she's—"

Bronson jumped up in fury.

"Proof!" he yelled. "Shut up! Haven't you got any—"

"Sit down! Of *course* you don't need any proof. It makes you angry clear through to hear me even *suggest*—any doubt of her—as it should. Well, that's how I felt about your mother when you were born. I was sure."

The boy sat slowly surrendering. A light seemed to have dawned in his darkness. His desperate eyes were appraising the sincerity of his father's face. He remained motionless, bending across toward Jim, thinking, his comprehension growing moment after moment. Jim fixed on him the steady gaze of the victor.

"Oh, well—" he sighed, after the passionate interval, still studying his father.

"You see how it was, don't you?" he asked, gently. He felt his hand tremble abruptly. He got up and began clearing away the food they had ignored.

"You take the butter down," he said.

Bronson shook himself out of his trance and departed without a word.

Jim finished his work, turned out the lantern, and sat down, smoking nervously, in an easy chair on the sleeping porch. He

couldn't stretch back at rest in it. He sat upright, going over the shocking contact with his son, the only time he had really met him all summer. Presently the boy came in and threw himself down on his cot. Minutes passed. Neither of them spoke. Jim kept glancing covertly toward him. The lad's long bones of legs sprawled out luminously in the dimness of the starlight.

After half an hour, Bronson sat up with dramatic suddenness. "Look here—" he began.

"What is it?"

"If she was *good,* then, how did she change?"

"You mean your mother?"

"I mean, if she was *good,* she would have stayed good. How could she change?"

"Everything changes. Everybody."

"Aunt Emily doesn't."

"Well, not that way. But every—"

"Look here!" The lad's voice had grown tortured again. "Could *she change?* COULD she? Aunt Emily?"

"No, she couldn't."

"Are you sure?"

Jim was thankful for the darkness. "Yes, I am," he replied, shortly. If *he* wasn't sure, who ever would be? He felt himself grow hot with confusion. He began to realize the situation. "It's not my fault that she hasn't changed!" he remembered. "And it's through her—through Emily—that my son believes—

"What did you say?" he asked, wearily.

"I said, 'How did *she* change?' "

"Your mother?"

He seemed to hate the word.

"I don't know." Jim was tired of it. "*I* can't judge people.

I can't say who's 'good' and who's 'bad' the way you do. When you're older, you'll understand these things. I suppose she 'changed' because—people sometimes—do impulsively what they know—isn't maybe the best thing. Too much moral pressure, or something."

"What's that?"

"What?"

"Moral pressure."

"I mean—if they constantly—or suddenly—are—well, made to think too much about some—course of action—circumstantial pressure—" . . . "I'll never go back to that house," he vowed. "What can I say?" Then aloud, "Really, I never thought it was any of my business why your mother—happened to do what she did."

"I think it's mine!"

"Well, maybe it is. I don't know. But you won't get any place by thinking so much about it. You'll—look at it differently—when you're older." Jim knew instantly he had used a hateful phrase.

"You mean I'll think it's all right, after while—what she did?"

"No, I didn't say that. You won't think it's right, but you'll understand why people do wrong. Bronson, this has never seemed to me so unfortunate—that she did as she did—as it seems now, to-day. I never supposed it would—make *you*—miserable. You've been unhappy, haven't you?"

"Unhappy!" echoed the boy. "Unhappy! I wanted to *kill* people. I was—lonely. I wanted to kill *everybody!*"

"You'll feel better now. If I had imagined you had such ideas, at first—if you had told me, Bronson—I would have told you the truth. I wish you had spoken about this at first."

"Well, you said I looked like *her* people. I thought you thought—"

Jim wondered why he hesitated to finish the sentence. After a little he took it up.

"Well, now you know. You understand. That's all over now. I wish to God it had never happened. But it's over. And we'll stick together now."

"You bet we will!" responded the boy, fervently.

Minutes passed and neither of them spoke. Jim was stretched out in his chair now, relaxed, weak. After a while he realized that his son was sleeping. Lying on his side, his knees drawn up, he had gone to sleep like a baby, his young head resting on his long arm. Jim rose and drew his chair nearer the cot and sat looking at him. The bathing suit accentuated the gauntness of the great, thin frame. What light there was gleamed vaguely still along the sharp bones of his lower leg, over his big, bare feet. "How huge a man he will be!" Jim thought, looking at his overgrown shoulders.

He bent over him yearningly. He remembered with a flash that when his son had gone to sleep with a bottle, in his little bed, a certain little yellow lock had fallen down just that way over his forehead. And he was filled with such keenness of emotion as he had not known for years. After all, every time that boy had slammed a door, even, it was because of this soreness, this fear of losing his father. "He wanted me!" Jim said to himself. "He felt lonely for me! He felt like he was my son when he saw me. He wondered why I didn't come to steal him! He's suffered over this. He had been almost crying. And his eyes—Well, Emily had been right about this, too. She had understood the boy's soreness." And as soon as he thought of Emily he drew his thoughts up sharply. It was a jeering bit of irony

that his son should be convinced of his relationship to his father by the impressiveness of the chastity of the one woman—the only woman—whose chastity he had ever sought to undermine—not to undermine, exactly, either—but—well—Jim didn't like to make the thought too clear. It was painful enough as it was. The boy might return to her, to Emily, to her righting and balancing loveliness when he would. Likely he would want to return to-morrow. But Jim Kenworthy would go, himself, to that house no more. Suppose Emily should change, before the boy's exacting eyes? "What's moral pressure?" he could hear the young voice demanding. "I kept away from her for years!" Jim said in defense of himself. "I must have been crazy when I said I'd come out for the summer. Or maybe I was only sick." And yet it had been the best place for the boy, after that home he had been sentenced to live in.

And Jim cursed himself afresh. What an unspeakable, inestimable fool he had been to try to keep from the boy the scandal of the divorce. He had thought to shield the woman, and the boy had seen through the thin covering of conventional decency he had been able to throw over her. The boy had learned it all in the most pitiful and disastrous way. It didn't seem possible now to him that he had deliberately given that boy to his mother's care, trusting to her sense of fairness to share him with him. Why hadn't he sued for the divorce when she suggested it? Why hadn't he denounced her publicly and demanded the child in the name of the law? Fool, he had been, as usual! The first fool of the world! All those years he had refrained from divorce for his mother's sake, to save her the pain of realizing his unhappiness, and she had known it all the time. She had been hurt because he never spoke to her of it. That was an example of the skill with which he had managed his

affairs. To be sure, in those early days, he had had no cause for divorce which would undoubtedly have persuaded the court to give him the boy. And it was the boy he had wanted. It was this innocent, sleeping, great child he had lived for, for years, and in two weeks and four days he was to lose him again for ten and a half months. "If only I could keep him with me!" Jim moaned. "Look what I've explained to him this evening! That house is no place for him now! If I could keep him with me, I could straighten him out. He'd be the good boy he used to be. He *was* a good child when he was smaller. I'll say that for him. He isn't spoiled yet, either, if only I could have him with me. I could make a man of him yet. And then thought grew blurred and dark with bitterness. "Look what I've made of myself!" one part of him cried. "I never touched a thing yet but I spoiled it. I've never had one thing I undertook turn out as I had planned. Look what I've done to my own small life. This boy's a bigger person altogether than I ever was. He's a whale, as Bob says. He's big, all the way through. I never had half the character, half the personality, that he has now! I'm weak and sick. I'll be all in, to-morrow, after this excitement. I'm not good for anything! I can't do anything for the poor, little, misguided duffer, with his temper and his hate and his cocksureness. He needs somebody to take care of him quick. If only he had Emily for his mother! Good God! What did I ever marry *her* for? What was I such a fool for? What's going to become of my boy now?"

Outside, through the quietness and darkness from time to time a little breeze would stir the high leaves of the oaks to rustling. Sometimes little catches of song floated up from some of the light-hearted camps down the river. Near him the child lay sleeping. Jim sat there looking at him for hours.

Chapter Seventeen

A CALLING, a helloing, an echoing of names rose booming from the old river when Jim was making his belated coffee the next morning. Listening, he distinguished his name. "Kenworthy!" men were calling. "Kenworthy!" Who could be wanting him there? He hurried out of the back door, and saw, in passing the veranda, that the voices had wakened Bronson, who was sitting up sleepily on the edge of his cot. Jim himself had only been awake a little while. From the top of the bluff he saw a motor boat drawn up at his landing, and an unshaven man of his own age, in a gray sweater and khaki knickers.

"Kenworthy about?" this individual called up to him hastily.

"I'm Kenworthy. What is it?"

"It's not you I want! I want that youngster—the one who overhauled my engine yesterday. I promised him to take him to the city this morning if he'd do it."

"Oh!" Jim was disappointed. "That's my son," he said. "I'll call him."

Bronson appeared. Jim saw a grin spread over the face of the man below. He didn't wonder. Bronson was sleepy. His yellow hair stood up roughly, uncombed. He was clothed in the bathing suit he had worn for two days.

"You ready?" the stranger asked, and Jim watched his amusement grow. The stranger admired the lad.

"I guess I won't go."

"Oh, I'll wait for you! I'm in no hurry."

"I guess I won't go to-day."

"Oh, come along! What's the trouble? Get into some clothes!"

"No, I guess I won't go."

"Well, suit yourself. But I told you the boat would be in use the rest of the week. And you said you wanted to drive her down. This is your chance. I won't be able to go again for some time."

"Go on, Bronson, if you want to. Breakfast's all ready. You can be ready in a jiffy."

"No, I'm not going."

"All right. I'm off." The stranger seemed annoyed. He started the engine.

Bronson regretted his displeasure. "I'm sorry I can't go," he called down, more politely than he had spoken before. "I can't go. Honestly." And then as the boat chugged out away into the blue stream, while Jim was standing close by him, Bronson suddenly stuck out his chest and called after the departing acquaintance in a roar that grew word by word:

"I'm going to stay with my FATHER!"

That cry of defiance boomed across the river and through Jim's heart. He realized that the boy, since he had come West, had never called him by that name before. And now he had spoken it, sung it out like a challenge to the world. He had no idea of the effect it made. In the next breath he said:

"I'll jump in before breakfast. I'll bring up the things." And he started on his awkward trot for the stairs down to the water. He danced along like a light-hearted, heavy-footed young elephant.

"He wouldn't have been happier if Emily had been here managing him," Jim thought, with gratification. "And I have been preferred to a motor boat!"

The lad came back up for breakfast in a gay mood. It was plain he had gone swimming in his skin, and donned the dry bathing suit for his morning costume. He had combed down his wet hair neatly. And he was so pink and fresh that Jim kept glancing across the table at him with satisfaction—more satisfaction than he had known all the summer. From time to time their eyes met. The boy was quiet, shy. But once he asked, laboriously:

"Did you have a good sleep, father?" That exciting word again, unconsciously.

"Indeed I did!" Jim spoke the truth. He had slept near dawn, a sleep as refreshing as it was needed, a good sleep, he could truly say. "What are you going to do to-day?" he asked. He had expected that Bronson would suggest going home.

"Oh, I don't know. I—I'll just stick around, I guess."

He kept looking at his father so curiously that at length Jim asked:

"What are you thinking about, Bronson?"

"Oh, nothing. I just wondered—"

"What did you wonder?"

After a moment, he remarked, suddenly, "*Your* mother wasn't a liar, was she, dad?"

"A liar! I should say she *wasn't!* I wish you'd cut that word out."

"I know it. I asked Aunt Emily, and she said she wasn't."

"Wasn't what?"

"She said your mother wasn't a liar. She said she always told the truth."

"Of *course* she told the truth! All decent people tell the truth. My mother—I wish you'd known her. She was a great woman."

"That's what Aunt Emily said. She said she was *good*."

"Of *course* she was 'good'! It seems—unfortunate—that you should ever even have asked that—that you—questioned it. When I was your age, I never—knew—anybody, you might say, intimately—any woman, whose—goodness I—doubted. I just took it for granted."

Bronson pondered this protest.

"How was that?" he asked.

"Well, I don't know—*how* it was. It was the way I was brought up. I—I think that's the normal way—for a boy to—be brought up. That's why—your way of talking—especially about your mother—seems to me—I can't stand it."

"Well—" remonstrated the boy. He said no more. But Jim saw hatred harden his face with a shadow too bitter for words.

"You know, son," Jim began, carefully, after a little, "I thought of something in the night I wanted to tell you." He was accustomed to speaking discreetly. But he hadn't often been conscious of so great a desire to find words that not even this stubborn child might by chance misinterpret. He went feeling his way along, studying the earnest face before him. "You know—this is just between you and me, Bronson. There isn't another person in the world I would tell this. I wouldn't have—occasion for telling anyone else. And I want you to understand—to believe—what you always seem to be doubting, and that is, that I am telling you the truth. You won't understand it all now, but you'll remember it, and later you'll get more out of it. I tell you frankly—that our marriage—your mother's and mine—was never very—successful. I want you to understand that it's the most important thing in the world—whom a man marries. It's most important

—and—there is a lot of chance about it. However careful, and wise a man is. And he isn't generally either—careful or wise. You remember that. Your mother and I—weren't well suited to each other. It wasn't her fault, you understand. It was—as unlucky for her as for me. Maybe more unlucky. Anyway, we—realized—that—that we had made a mistake—long before you were born. So that I once—I decided that it would be better for us both—to put an end to it. Or at least—to tell the truth—I thought it would be the best thing for me. I made up my mind—I was so sure of what I was going to do that I went out to tell my mother about it. You understand—I never doubted—your mother's faithfulness—her—chastity, or anything like that. We simply—couldn't get along. I knew I had to tell my mother, and I can't tell you how I dreaded that. You see, she didn't believe in divorce. She thought divorce was a terrible thing. And it is. It had never come within her experience. And in those days, out there, it was—less common than it is now—of course. I knew it would be—hard on her. I had never—let her know how I felt—about the—my marriage. I tried to have her think always—that we were—happier than we were. Of course, she knew all the time. I never said a word to her about—our—incompatibility. I mean, that we didn't get along well, you understand. But she knew. And finally I went out to tell her. I got there on the afternoon train, and we had supper, and I didn't have a chance to tell at supper. There was an old woman living with her—there was always some old woman or some orphan living with her. You know—we were very hard up—when we were boys, though mother was comfortable at that time. She had inherited a little money from a brother. But still she always had some old bore living with her, whom she wouldn't turn out. And that one—she ate

some supper, and then she insisted that mother help her upstairs to bed. She wouldn't let me help her. So I sat there at the table, waiting for mother to come back, and planning what I would say. Screwing my courage up." After a pause, after the boy's curious "Well?" Jim went on:

"Well, mother came down and sat down to finish her supper. It used to seem to me that my mother never had a chance to eat a meal in peace in her life. She always had to jump to do something—for somebody or other. And I always resented it. And that night it made me—feel sorry for her—that she'd had so little comfort, you know, in her life. And she began right away asking me about your mother. You see, I had brought your mother up here just before that. We—we hadn't been getting along—very well, and I was—I thought, maybe, if we'd come up here together—for a holiday together—get away alone—we might—hit it off better for a while. She didn't want to come. I'll say that for her. It was a foolish idea on my part, the whole thing. She never—liked wild places. She didn't like—mosquitoes and snakes—and we had a— It was worse than ever. And that's what determined me—why I came to tell my mother what I was going to do. My mind was all made up. So mother began right away to ask me about this place, and your mother. She asked me what flowers were in bloom. She asked me if I had pointed them out to your mother. 'Did you show her the pipsissewa?' she asked me. 'Did you find the blue-eyed grasses?' Mother had never been back there since her honeymoon, but she remembered exactly the end of the long lake where those little flowers grew. She went right on to say that she could see it still. She said that the first night they were there—Bronson—my father—when they knelt down to pray (we used to have family prayers always when I was a boy)

he thanked God for the blue lake and the blue-eyed grasses and the blue-eyed woman. And she said he made a little song about it. And she began to say it to me, and that, Bronson, was the only time in my life I ever doubted she was telling me the truth. I sat looking at her. I never saw her look—so—beautiful before. I never had thought how good to look at she must have been when she was young. She began to say, 'Pipsissewa and the blue-eyed grasses,' and then she stopped, and—she was smiling to herself, and she said she couldn't remember the rest of it. I knew she knew every word of it, but she—it was—something too—intimate for her to say to me. And I was so taken back by her—by her expression—I couldn't say anything, and then she suddenly stretched out her hand across the table to me, like this, and she said, 'And the next spring *you* were born, Jimmy!' And she just sat and beamed at me. Bronson, I wouldn't have told her what I came to say—not for the life of me. I felt like a criminal! I couldn't let her know how—I hated life—after all—she'd gone through for me. I never said a word about it. I said to myself I would stick it out as long as she lived—if your mother could—no matter what happened."

"Then what did happen?"

"Well, it was only a little while after that that I knew you were to be born. And that changed the situation. It seemed providential, almost, that that visit to my mother—had—hindered me doing what I intended. I—felt ashamed of myself—for having—judged your mother—severely. For having brought her up here, and everything. And after you were born—I never thought—again—so much—about—a separation. I wanted—to be where you were."

"You bet you did! *You* played with me. *She* never played with me. She never came round where I was."

"Your mother was—she always had a lot to do, Bronson. She was busy."

"Busy!"

"I mean, she never was—what is called a domestic woman. She cared—for other things more—for public work. There's nothing wrong in that. But I was—unfortunately—a domestic man. That was the trouble—perhaps."

"What do you act that way for? What do you act as if it was *your* fault for?"

"I—I'm not acting that way. But, of course, I don't want you to think—that—none of it was my fault. I don't pretend I was a—model husband—for a woman like your mother. I—wish—you wouldn't hate her so. I wish you would—appreciate her. She really—is a—brilliant woman. And she's very fond of you."

The boy laughed.

Jim summoned courage to go on: "Of course she isn't—demonstrative—she isn't—what you call demonstrative. But she's your mother, after all."

Bronson jumped up from the table. He couldn't stand that sort of talk. "She's no mother of mine!" he cried. "I won't have anything to do with her! I told her that."

"Bronson!"

"I *did!* I told her she needn't think she could be my mother and go crawling round into—"

"Bronson!" Jim rose from his chair.

"Well, I *did!* She asked me what I tried to run away for. I told her. I said she needn't think—!"

"Oh, Bronson!"

"She's no mother of mine. I don't speak to her. I've never spoken to her since."

"Since what?"

"Since they got me back from Albany. It was in April."

"You mean to tell me you haven't spoken to your mother since then?"

"Why should I speak to her? I told her everything plain *then*. I said she couldn't be my mother if she was going—!"

"Bronson, I told you to drop that! Oh, how could you have done that! Oh, you ought never to have done that!"

"She needn't think—"

"Bronson, you *mustn't* do that. You mustn't—hate her. You can't go back feeling like that—"

"Go back where?"

"To your mother."

"I'm not going back!"

"You'll have to. The court's decision—"

"Father!"

"What's the matter?"

"You said I didn't *have* to go back. You said I could stay with you now."

"No, I didn't, Bronson. I can't do anything—"

"You said last night we'd stick together." He sat down weakly on the table, disappointment and terror on his face.

"Bronson! My son! I meant—I meant—we'd understand each other! I meant—we would be friends."

"You meant you'd send me back there. You want me to go back *there*."

"Of course, I don't *want* you to go. I *want* you with me. But—we can't help ourselves. The court—"

"I'm not afraid of any court."

"I'm not afraid of a court, myself. But I recognize—duty—"

"Well, I don't. You can get that through your head right *now.* There's no court that can make me go back *there*—to *her!*"

"There's no use talking that way, my dear boy. You'll go back the first week in September."

"No, I won't. We'll stick together. We'll run away."

"You must be reasonable. Where could we run to?"

"We could run to a thousand places. We could stay in these woods together. I could trap for you. We could find a cave and live there."

"If you were to be a day late getting to New York, Bronson, your mother—would be anxious about you. She'd send—men—after you."

"She'd never find us. We could go way up north, where there isn't anybody. We could live in—with the Indians. We could take Bill with us."

"I couldn't. I couldn't—disregard the law. And there isn't a place in the United States where your mother—wouldn't find you. You couldn't hide in this country."

"We could go to France, then. There's big woods in France. Let's you and me go to France, father!"

"My dear boy! How could we get to France now? I haven't—enough money to support you in France, besides. I've got to get back—to work."

"We could get into the army together, and go over, and she'd never find us. We could fight. I'd rather be killed by a Heine than go back there! *You don't know.* It's *bad,* there! You don't know how bad I am there. You can't imagine how bad I am, father. And here I'm good. Ain't I good here with you, father? What's the matter, dad? Are you sick? You look—sick! You don't need to worry. I'll take care of my-

self! I'll go to France *myself*. The Canadian army'll take me, if you aren't well enough to go with me. I'd be all right there!"

"My dear boy!"

"You feel bad, father? What's the matter? You lie down. I'll—I'll take care of you if you feel bad. Aunt Emily said I was to take care of you."

"I'm all right. I—felt—tired. This—makes me feel—sick."

"What does?"

"This situation. This—your situation. I—I wish you didn't feel this way, Bronson."

"Are you worrying about *me?*" Bronson was genuinely surprised. "You don't need to think about me. I can take care of myself. I want to get into the army, anyway. I'd be—I'd be straight if I was in the army. But I'd rather stay here with you. I'll stay with Aunt Emily. I guess you'd like to have me, too."

"Bronson, you can't go into the army. And you can't stay with me. You may as well face the truth. You've got to go back to your mother. I've got to have you there the first of September."

The lad stood looming above Jim, in the little bare room, his furious will alert, his sense of responsibility for his father struggling with it.

"Father, now you look *here,*" he began. "You better take a sleep. You lie down. You don't look right. You needn't feel bad about me. You can't help it if you can't get me back to her. Nobody can. Because I won't *go*. I'll *never* go. You get *that* through your head. I'd rather die than live in that house. Now you take a little sleep. It's—all settled. I won't ever go. Come on. Lie down." He propelled his father toward his cot.

They sat down there, side by side, near each other.

"Bronson—" began Jim, weakly.

"What's the matter? Don't you understand, father? If you can't run away with me, I'll go alone. I'll stay with you till then, till the first. And then I'll clear out. I'll hide. And you won't know where I am. So she can't say anything to you. I won't get you in bad with her."

"It isn't that," said Jim. "I can't endure to hear you talking this way, Bronson."

"What way?"

"So—stubbornly. So— You're so headstrong. You say such wild things."

"Wild things?" Bronson was hurt.

"I mean—you know—a boy like you must—do what he's told to do. You can't just lay down the law this way. You—can't say—where you'll go and what you'll do. You're only fourteen—"

"I'd like to know why I can't!"

"You can't defy—authority. You're a minor—"

"You bet I can! Nobody's going to say where I can stay and where I can't stay! Some dirty old major trying to make me live there just because I'm a minor!"

"That's what I object to—such things as that. Why, they make me feel—" Jim stopped.

Bronson sat staring at him, bewildered.

"You're only a boy, after all. You ought to be—obeying—somebody—learning something—you ought to be in school."

Bronson was greatly relieved. He reassured his father eagerly. "Oh, that's all right! I know enough. I bet—I used to think I knew all the history there was in the world. But I don't. Johnnie said I didn't know anything. I don't know

much history. And Bill taught me 'most everything. I guess I know as much as most boys."

"Who's Johnnie?"

"Johnnie? He's our teacher. Only we don't call him that when he's around, you bet! Bill got him. Bill said he couldn't even read a newspaper now in the war, without coming on some history he didn't know. He didn't know about Alsace-Lorraine. 'I got to learn history,' he says to me. So he got Johnnie. And he let me come in, in the evenings, to the shop. Gee! that was swell, dad!"

Jim was confused. "What was swell?"

"Johnnie. The way he talked. He smoked and he talked every night till twelve or one. Bill said I might as well be sitting up learning history and sleeping all day, as raising hell all the morning when he couldn't look after me. 'You've got to shut up and settle down and learn something,' he says to me, 'if you're ever going to build airplanes. If you don't quit fighting with your tutors, you'll be a wild man,' he says. And he says to Johnnie, right away, 'Here's a kid that's a millionaire, and he's got more brains than money. But it won't ever do him any good,' he says to him, 'because he hasn't got any sense. He won't work. He just loafs about and fights. And he thinks he can beat the world building airplanes that way,' he says. 'You begin at Adam and Eve, and teach him history, so he won't grow up a nut like me,' Bill says to him. And Johnnie says, 'Adam and Eve nothing! I'll begin with the mud bug,' he says. Gee! he was hard boiled, dad!"

"Who was?"

"Johnnie. You didn't dare to draw your breath when he was around. Bill tells everybody in the house where to get off, but

you bet he don't monkey with Johnnie. He just taught us what he pleased. And he began clear back at the mud bugs."

"Mud bugs?"

"That's what Bill called them for short. Johnnie called them Amœba. And he just talked and talked, about all the animals and the species of them, and evolution and cave men—and the first kings and mummies, and how they did things. Gee! When he talked he went this way, dad." Bronson moved his hands sleight-of-hand fashion back and forth, "and we saw what he talked about. When he talked about Julius Cæsar, there he was! And the next day Bill and I talked about it, and in the evening he quizzed us about all he'd told us the day before. He taught us everything there was to know, I thought. But he said he hadn't. Said we didn't know anything yet, and neither did he. And he took us everywhere. He showed us everything. I drove over every place George Washington ever walked. You just expected to see him coming round the corner when Johnnie got to talking! We went from Ticonderoga to the Potomac. He made us walk from Philadelphia to Valley Forge, even when it rained. And do you know what happened? I got so tired I vomited. So he let us off. Because George Washington's men had to walk—that was."

"You mean you went driving about with—this Johnnie?"

"Sure! Bill and I went. But *I* did the driving."

"But I thought you said you were locked up?"

"Well, I was locked up. But sometimes if I'd do what he wanted me to, if I'd learn a lot of history, Bill would get Veile to let me out to go some place with him and Johnnie. Veile likes Bill, and Bill likes Veile."

"But who is this man, this—Johnnie?"

Bronson answered carefully: "His name was—Clement—

Clement—Dales Smithson. He was a professor in some college. But not in any good college. Bill said to him one night, 'Why don't you teach in some school that plays football,' he says, 'like Yale or Harvard?' And he says to Bill, 'Why don't you drive a car with nine wheels?' You can't sass him, dad. I knew that. I just wanted to see what I could do with him. I knew he'd lick me if I didn't behave." Bronson smiled reminiscently.

"Lick you?"

"Yes, he licked me once." Bronson seemed quite satisfied with this fact.

"Did your mother know that?" Jim asked, bewildered.

It took only the thought of that woman to change the boy's face, even the attitude of his body. Jim regretted his question. He vowed not to mention her name again.

"I told you I didn't speak to her." Bronson could only growl.

Jim hurried to change the subject. "How long did he teach you?" he asked.

"Till he went to France. He went to work with the Quakers. He won't fight. Nobody can make *him* fight if he don't want to. And he don't, you bet. Anyway, he's too old. And that makes him mad. I bet he would have took me with him if he knew I wanted to go. He could have got me accepted to work with him. Maybe he can now."

"Bronson!"

"He just went a little while ago. If I had known you wouldn't keep me, I could have gone with him. I was right there on the boat with him. He could have hid me. And nobody would have dared to say a word to him! The captain—he made the captain show me all the boat. The captain said, 'Is this the young devil you were telling me about?' And he said, '*No!*' Father, he *liked* me. He bawled the captain out for calling me

a young devil. He says, 'This is the lad that's a millionaire and has got more brains than money,' he told him. 'If I could have a class of boys like him, they would drive your ship overland and get to California before the train,' he says. And then they all showed me everything. I could have hid lots of places in that ship.

"My dear boy!"

"Father, you lie down. You take a little rest. I guess—I'll go swimming now—so you can rest. It'll be time for dinner then."

The boy spoke with a finality that was appalling. There was no shadow of doubt left in his mind about his decision. He had decided not to go back to his mother, and his mind was free now for play. He started for the door, and Jim, sitting on the edge of his cot, watched him disappear over the side of the bluff.

Then he lay down, limply.

Chapter Eighteen

All that day the flood of the boy's headlong words flowed on. Unknowingly he revealed himself without fear to his dismayed father. Jim's interest in every detail of his son's life would carry him along comfortably enough on the current for a time, and then suddenly, as if his boat had struck a deadhead, he came with a tearing jolt up against some unsuspected frightfulness in the child's mind. Without in the least realizing it, Bronson time and again sent a chill through him. They talked all the time Bronson rowed them up to the farmhouse for dinner. He talked as he ate. He talked as they drifted back. They sat down together on the veranda. It was extremely hot and close, and Bronson talked the whole afternoon away, while Jim listened in apprehension. It was plain that, with a morbid interest in the subject of divorce, he had read every detail of all the divorce scandals that had appeared in the papers—that he had by heart all the history of the children involved in them. Jim had to cry wistfully to him, as they lay stretched out on their cots side by side:

"Oh, Bronson! That's horrible! Oh, I hope you manage to marry normally, happily. I hope you don't go and make the same sort of a—mess I made!"

The lad's reply came back assuredly.

"Sure I'll marry all right. When I want to get married, I'll marry some one like Aunt Emily." And while Jim considered that with a pang, the child continued, placidly, "I'd marry her right now if I was old enough."

"She's already married."

"What'd you say?"

"I said she was already married."

Bronson was lying on his back, playing at touching his finger tips together as far above him as possible. He stopped that game and turned lazily toward his father.

"Who's married?" he asked.

"Your aunt's married. You've got to remember Uncle Bob."

The boy propped himself up on an elbow and gazed curiously at his father, who was looking at him shortly.

"Uncle Bob?" he asked.

"Yes, Uncle Bob."

"Oh, well! Uncle Bob!" Bronson settled back carelessly on his pillow. He dismissed so small an obstacle as a husband from his mind forever, by his almost contemptuous pronunciation of the word.

Jim was annoyed by that inflection.

"If a woman's married, you can't plan to marry her!"

Bronson was playing with his finger tips again, his long arms stretched upward as far as possible. After a few seconds he answered in a matter-of-fact way, "*I* can."

Saying that, he had convinced his father that indeed he spoke the truth. "If that boy wants a woman, he'll take her," he thought, with disgust. "He'll go hewing and hacking his way without pity through all the relationships of life. He's capable of anything." . . . "All I've got to say to you is that if you do you'll be like Veile—"

Bronson turned quickly on his elbow again. "Who? Me?"

"Yes, *you*. If you go—tampering with a woman's faithfulness, you'll be doing what—you hate him for. You can't go—damning women the way you do for—not being true to their vows, and then say you yourself—intend—ignoring them."

Bronson was peering intently at his father now. He kept on peering.

"You can't go—you can't demand—chastity in your mother—unless you intend respecting it—in other women—in girls—"

Still the boy's intent gaze scrutinized his father's face. Jim's gaze never wavered.

"Not if you've got any honor," he added.

"Honor?" repeated the boy, still questioning his father's face.

"Yes, honor," replied Jim, shortly.

"What's that?"

"It's something you seem to think highly of in women!" Jim commented, somewhat grimly, keeping his eyes on the boy's. Then suddenly he remembered the mood, the spirit of his outrageous assault upon Emily. His eyes fell. He felt himself getting red.

"Bronson, I'm tired," he murmured. "Let's—not talk. Let's have a sleep. I'll tell you all about this—after I've had a nap."

"I told you to go to sleep, father. You look—sick. Don't you want a drink—or something?"

How earnest the lad's kindness was, Jim thought, gratefully. How pitiful his innocent faith in his father.

"No, thank you. I—just want to sleep."

He turned over, and presently he heard the boy sleeping. "He has a good conscience," he reflected. He could hear Emily's gentle remonstrance, "Now that was scarcely a brotherly thing to do, Jimmy!" "Honor," he thought. "The boy wants to know what honor is. He asks *me!*" He sighed.

Two hours later he pulled himself some way out of the agony of nightmare; his son was standing accused of arson, of murder, of rape, and he was standing before the court, trying to

defend him, smitten dumb. No word could he utter in behalf of the abhorred wretch who was his son. His tongue, swollen tight against his cheeks, must burst through his face, his throat was working in convulsions; his boy was being condemned. He must cry out in protest.

Then he awoke, struggling. His son was bending over him in lanky solicitation.

"What's the matter? Been dreaming? You've had some sleep. *I'll* say you have! I got up and went swimming, and you never woke up. And I came up to see if you were awake, and you weren't. So I went back down with the kids. Diving. Supper's all ready."

Bronson was pleased with himself. His nose and his cheeks, his neck and his ears, were sunburnt to a crimson that seemed to glow with good will and peace. His yellow hair he had combed apparently with his fingers after coming out of the river. He burst upon his father's waking eyes like a commanding vision of vitality and light-heartedness; he radiated such strength, such contentment, that Jim's weariness was flooded with delight in him.

"Oh, Bronson!" he exclaimed. The passion of his voice surprised the lad. It was as if his father had said, "I love you so!" And he retreated, in confusion, toward the door, turning his eyes away.

"I just got to bring up the butter and heat your milk!" he murmured, disappearing.

Jim sat on the edge of his bed, waiting his coming, excited, too easily all shaken by the sense of the lovableness of his son, by the joy of possessing him. Now he was seeing him as Emily saw him, as Bob saw him, the depth of gentleness that was in him, the capacity for quiet happiness. "This is what he might

have been like if things had been right for him," he groaned, "if he hadn't had all this trouble!" He felt tears coming to his eyes. He felt them beginning to run down his face. He struggled weakly to his feet, to light a cigarette. "I can't do this! I can't let him see this!" he thought. "I've got to keep hold of myself." He couldn't even walk back and forth. He was too tired. He sat down on his chair at the table, where Bronson had arranged the supper. He thought of the boy's evident pleasure in doing that for him, and tears came again to his eyes. "I've got to keep hold of myself," he thought, wearily. He got up and went to the door of the porch. The sun had set. Between the trunks of the slender oaks he saw the pines on the farther shore of the river black against the fading sky. He saw Bronson appearing above the edge of the bluff, coming toward him among the trees, with the butter held carefully against the green stripe around his stomach. It was only to hide his fear—"I can't make a fool of myself," he kept saying under his breath—that he began:

"I'll heat the milk—"

"No, you won't. I'll heat that milk myself. You sit down. I'll wait on you. It'll be ready right away. *I'm* cook, dad. You can light the lamp, though, if you want to." Bronson was stirring the milk in a pan over the alcohol burner.

"Well—it isn't dark yet. We don't need a lamp, do we? I don't like—a lamp on a table without a shade."

"Suit yourself!" replied the boy. He poured out the milk and sat down at the table, casting a possessive glance over the supper he had prepared. Jim began eating his prepared food doggedly. Bronson fell upon his hungrily. He sat and went on eating contentedly, slice after slice of bread and butter disappearing into him. The two of them kept glancing across at each other.

At length Bronson helped himself to a second great piece of fresh cake, and sighed with perfect content.

"Gee! dad, ain't this swell?"

"What?"

"Us having supper together like this!"

"It's great, Bronson!" Then he added, not being able to hold back his words, "I wish you were going to stay with me!"

Bronson smiled. "I am," he said. No fear of separation was troubling him.

Jim felt he must be firm. "You know you have to go back—" he began.

"No, I don't. I don't know any such thing." He spoke with as much composure as the layer of the cake in his mouth would allow.

"Bronson!" Jim protested. "You will have to go back."

"I won't." The boy was polite, but firm.

"You oughtn't to contradict me that way, son," Jim remarked, gently. It seemed to him just then that there was no concession of authority he would not make to the boy to keep him in his happy mood.

"I know it," Bronson acknowledged, tolerantly. "I won't contradict you again. You just understand I'm not going back there. We won't talk any more about that."

His father's insistence made little smiles of amusement play around his lips. And these little smiles of amusement reduced Jim to a helpless silence. Bronson broke it at length. He had eaten all the cake on the table, and he seemed settled down into deep content. Yet he spoke wistfully:

"Did you used to sit at that table and talk all the time with your mother like this when you were a kid, dad?"

"What table?"

"That table in Aunt Emily's house."

"Not at Aunt Emily's table. That was *her* house, you understand. She lived there with her aunt. We lived in our own house. You know the father of the boy my father saved when he died, *he* gave us a house."

"Where is it? You never showed it to me."

"Well, I can't say you ever encouraged me to, Bronson. How could I show you that poor little house when you acted so impertinent about Aunt Emily's beautiful place?"

"Do you think I acted bad about her house? What do you mean? I didn't do anything." Bronson leaned across the table toward his father, startled by the accusation.

"That first night you came. The way you acted about the bathroom. And at supper. I never saw a boy act quite so bad in my life."

"But look here, dad," Bronson expostulated, earnestly, "I didn't *know* you then. I didn't *know* any of you!"

"I don't see that that's any excuse for you. You don't have to act like a—like an underbred—degenerate—I don't know what—just because you don't know people."

"But I thought maybe you'd lock me up! I didn't know what you'd do with me. I didn't intend to stay there. I intended to run away. First I intended to get off the train. But I kinda wanted—to wait and see you first. And when I saw you there at the station, I felt right away like I was your boy."

"Oh, Bronson!"

"Well, I did. And so I went along with you. And then you said I was like *her* family, the first thing. And I thought you didn't—"

"I didn't say that!"

"Yes, you did—the next day."

"But I hadn't an idea what was in your mind! If you had told me in the first place—"

"But I thought you didn't *want* me! You said I was like *her* folks. Dad, when we go back, let's go and see the house you lived in. Where's that boy now? Is he still there?"

"That boy? No. He's been dead years." Jim looked at his son thoughtfully. "I'll tell you about that boy," he began, with a purpose, and then he sat silent.

"Well, go on. Tell me."

"This is just between us, you know, Bronson. I wouldn't tell anybody but you."

"All right. Go on. Spit it out."

"That boy died when I was about as old as you are now. I must have been about thirteen, I guess—"

"I'm going on fifteen!"

"Yes. I know it. Maybe I wasn't even thirteen then. I was in the eighth grade, though, I remember. I wasn't half as tall as you are now. I was a little shaver." Jim was choosing his way carefully along. The boy wanted to speed him up.

"Well, how'd he die?"

"He was shot. Murdered. He was about—eight years older than I was—about twenty. He was found shot one morning."

"Who shot him?"

"Well, that's the story. He was a disgrace—a disappointment to good parents if any boy ever was. They were fine old people. And he was—just a common bum. Even at twenty. He had—he had betrayed a girl—quite a young girl. It was—it was all a—revolting case. She had a baby, and died when it was born. Everybody knew about it. It was all— The details were shocking. Everybody knew her father had shot him, and

no one would—not even the boy's parents took action against him. Feeling was so high in the town."

There was a silence.

"Gee! You know interesting stories, dad!"

"That wasn't what I started to tell you. They found that boy's body in a prairie near town. It was late in the fall. And they brought it home one rainy afternoon; they carried it to his father's. My mother and Mrs. Childs had always been friends. And, anyway, when there was trouble or death, any place, people always sent for mother. So she started over there when she heard it. I met her on the way, as I was coming home from school. And she told me what she had left for our supper, if she didn't get back in time. I was asleep on the couch when she came home—late. And I knew something had happened to her, for she was—upset; she looked so different that I was frightened. And she wouldn't answer me. She made me go to bed. And after while I waked up and I heard her crying in her room. She was crying—very—wretchedly. Sobbing. I never heard or saw her cry but that time. And you can bet I was scared. The door between our rooms was shut—there are only two rooms upstairs in that house, and the door was always open between them. It didn't seem right to have that door shut. So I got up and went in to her. But she wouldn't talk to me or tell me anything. She wanted me to go to bed. But I sat on the edge of hers till she took me in with her, under the covers. It was a cold night, I remember. It must have been October or November. And she cried and cried, but I went to sleep at last. I was only a little duffer. And after while she woke me up. She made me sit up in bed, so I wouldn't go back to sleep. I sat up there, and she held the quilt around me. She wasn't crying then. And she asked me, just as she always spoke to me, if I knew why Arthur

Childs had been shot. And I said I did. And she said— Do you know what she said to me? Imagine this, Bronson! She had gone over to Mrs. Childs'—to the boy's mother, you know —and Mrs. Childs, when she saw mother coming in—she just cried out and said she wished my father had never saved her boy, that Arthur of hers, from the train! She said it would have been better for him to have died then, when he was young! I suppose she was beside herself, but, anyway, she spoke with bitterness and—reproof—to my mother, that way, in her sorrow. Well, that was a hard—experience for my mother. That was what she had been crying about. To have all my father's—sacrifice, and all her—widowhood, you know—discounted that way. She told me that. And she told me all about it, and she impressed it on me that however bad that boy was, my father still did a fine thing. The good shepherd had to give his life for the sheep, she said. That's from the Bible, you know, Bronson, about Christ. And, anyway, she didn't think my father ever thought he was giving his life. He just saw that child in danger, and his impulse was to save him. Because he was always tender to little things, she told me. And that boy had his chance to live and enjoy himself, and it wasn't my father's fault that he didn't. And mother said she understood how Mrs. Childs could cry out so. And she was right. It would have been lots better, she told me, for the boy to have died, than that he should grow up to do such terrible things. My mother had been to see the mother of that girl, too, because they were poor and some one had to help them with their funeral. And then—"

The boy was sitting perfectly tense, with his eyes on his father, so interested he couldn't endure the pause.

"And then what?" he commanded.

"Well, this is just between us two, Bronson. My mother

made me get out of bed. She made me kneel down beside her there, in the cold room, and I shivered, I remember. I can see yet how the moonlight came in on the pieces of rag carpet. And she put her arm around me and began to pray. She said—I don't know how she could have done this. She was perfectly calm about it, too. She said (she was praying, you understand), she said: 'Dear Lord, here's my little boy. Thou knowest why he is fatherless. He is young and good now. And I say in Thy presence before him that I would rather have him die under the train to-morrow morning than live and be such a wicked man, causing such sorrow in the world. Hear my prayer, Lord Jesus, and unless he can choose to do the right he knows to do, let him die now.' And I cried and insisted I wasn't going to do anything bad. And she hugged me—she didn't do that often—and kissed me, and said she was sure I would never do what I knew was wrong. And then she told me a lot about my father. And she let me sleep with her till the morning. And when I was going to school next morning, I met a boy who told me that Mr. Childs and the minister and an old neighbor or two had taken that body to the cemetery, and buried it privately, early that morning, in the rain. And that scared me more than my mother's prayer had. It was pouring rain—and a dark day—and I still remember how—desolate and—awed—I felt. I've never told anybody about that but you, naturally."

After a long pause, Bronson asked, simply, "So then you never did?"

"Never did what?"

"What that boy did."

"My God, no! I should say *not! That* sort of thing! I told you it was—atrocious! *Nobody* can do that, you understand, without being—an *outcast!* That's beyond the limit! Why,

Bronson—" Jim could scarcely find words for his indignation, yet almost at once he collapsed from righteous indignation into shame. A thought came into his mind, "Is there then so much difference between a child and a chaste wife?" he asked himself. He went on lamely, "No one can do that," growing red as he spoke.

The boy got up and went to the door, looking out into the darkness. He stood there silently a little while with his back toward his father. Then he spoke bitterly.

"*I* could do that," he said. "I'd just *like* to do that."

Jim started up. "What's that you said?" he cried to him, sternly.

Bronson turned his head and spoke over his shoulder: "I said I'd just like to do that. I'm like my mother!"

"Bronson! Come here! Come here, I say! Sit down, you little coward!"

Jim was too tired to stand. The boy faced him angrily.

"Coward?"

"You're a coward! I said you were a *coward!* You begin to feel an impulse that every man feels, and you blame it on to your mother! You haven't a grain of an excuse for such a remark! Not a grain! You're too lazy, too silly, to exercise a little self-control, the decency that's in you, and you blame your mother for it! Didn't I tell you—"

Sitting there facing each other on the cot, Jim summed up with authority and disgust a great deal he had been wanting to say to the lad ever since he had arrived. Bronson contradicted him and interrupted him imperially, and steadily lost ground before him. They had been talking an hour when the boy said, in a patient, injured voice:

"Well, I suppose I can go and get a drink now?"

"Go and get a drink if you want one." Jim spoke impatiently, depressed by the consciousness that his words were futile, annoyed with himself for imagining he could by mere words influence such a flood of wilfulness as that boy seemed to him to be. He stretched himself out on his cot and continued to lie there after Bronson had come in again, though he knew the boy was sitting uneasily on the edge of the bed and something he wanted to say was perched uneasily on the end of his tongue. Jim didn't intend to encourage him to further engagement of affection that evening. He was too tired. He got up finally and undressed, and lay down for the night.

Bronson still sat unsatisfied.

"You'd better go to bed," Jim suggested. He spoke impersonally.

The boy continued to sit there, uncomfortably. "Father—" he began at length.

"Well?" His tone seemed not to have been one which encouraged his son. He had to ask again, gently, "What is it you want, Bronson?"

The boy hesitated a moment more. "Dad, show me how to pray!" he blurted out.

"How to pray! Good Lord! I don't pray!" Jim had sat straight up.

"You don't?"

"No, I—don't *pray!*"

"But your mother prayed."

"That's another matter."

"But why don't you?"

"I—don't know. I—"

"Don't you believe in it?"

"Yes, certainly. That is, for some people. I'm sure my mother—was, well, sustained—by prayer, you might say."

"*She* made it work, *didn't* she? She prayed on the floor that you wouldn't—be a bad man, and you aren't. Maybe I could make it—work."

"It's no magic, Bronson. It's not a trick."

"I didn't say it was a trick. I thought you prayed. I just asked you to show me how you do it."

"Well—I'm sorry. I—I think it's a good thing to do. For some people—for some temperaments."

"Don't you remember how she did it?"

The boy tortured him. He made him feel his inadequacy to the point of agony. "It may be this child needs a faith. After all, my father and mother were controlled all their lives by theirs. He may inherit some capacity, some such need." The thought ran thus through his mind. Aloud he said:

"Of course I used to know prayers. My mother taught them to me so long ago I can't remember her doing it. I know lots of them." And he sat there in the darkness trying to remember some scrap of prayer. His mind seemed to betray him. But not a scrap of a petition could he, Martha Kenworthy's son, recall.

"She taught me to say—she used to teach me—" he murmured. He was unable to go on. But Bronson didn't mind his hesitation. He had begun:

"They used to have wars and battles about prayer books, dad. I asked Johnnie what they were, and he showed me one, because it sounded phony to me that people fought about prayers and things like that. Bill said it was all bunk, and Johnnie said it wasn't. He told me a prayer to say."

"What was that?"

The boy hesitated. "'Twasn't any good," he said, sullenly, after a pause. "I wouldn't say it." Then he grumbled, "It's all right for him to say. Anyway, he never said but half of it himself. He said so."

"What was it?"

The words came resentfully: "Give us, O Lord, in this world the knowledge of the truth."

"That's a good prayer. What's the matter with that?"

"I know enough truth now. I know what she does now, crawling around into people's— I don't need to know any more, I guess."

"Bronson!"

The boy went on, quite humbly and earnestly: "Tell me what your mother used to say. She was good."

Jim grasped at a sudden memory.

"I'll tell you one," he said. "'Create within me a clean heart, O God, renew a right spirit within me.' That's a good prayer, I used to say that. It can't possibly do any—"

"That's all right." Bronson was repeating the prayer thoughtfully. "I've got a right spirit within me now, dad, already. I didn't have when I came here. But I've got it now, all right. That's why I'm going to stay with you. That's why I'm not going back. You get me? What was it? 'Create in me a clean spirit, O God—' How'd it go?"

Jim repeated it, and the boy, sitting on the edge of the bed, said it over and over half aloud. Finally, when he had got the order of the words in his mind, he asked, abruptly:

"Is it better to get down on the floor to do it?"

"Oh, I—don't know that it matters—much. Of course, I was taught to kneel. I don't know—"

There were a few minutes of silence. Jim lay thinking

tumultuously. Never had he seen his son in what seemed a mood so providentially receptive. He remembered the horror of his arrival, the horror of his premature hatred and deliberate insolence, his precocious rage against existence. If only this mood, this childlike sweetness, might persist! A fragment of old prayers came to him, the memory of Sunday afternoons when he recited golden texts to his mother. The memory came poignantly. If only his mother had been with him now, to undertake this lad! Bronson and his mother would have been two of a kind. The boy was like her. He wondered he had never seen it. If she could have been present, to surround this lad with what he needed! "Her faith, her courage, were lost on me!" Jim thought, swiftly. "This boy could have received them. He would have appreciated her. She could have given him what he needs." She must have taught him things so that he might pass at least fragments of them on to this grandson of hers. He spoke aloud:

"I don't think it matters so much whether you kneel or not, son! It matters what—spirit is in you—the attitude of your mind. I remember my mother used to say (she taught me this), 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me,'" Jim paused uncomfortably.

"Well, what's the idea?" Bronson urged him, presently. "I haven't got any iniquity in my heart."

"I mean—Bronson—I don't think you can pray—when you're —hating anyone. I mean—try not to hate your mother, son. If you pray, you can't hate people."

"Her!" It was the snarl of hatred the boy always gave when his mother was mentioned. Jim knew, without seeing, what expression had come over his face. He realized his mistake.

He ought never to have expected so great a thing of him. But his moan had moved the lad.

"Father," he murmured. It was almost apologetic.

Jim said, presently, "I only meant that those who pray—must forgive their—enemies. That's—the idea of it—I suppose—that if you get yourself into the right frame of mind to pray—you've—got your prayer answered."

When Bronson spoke, Jim saw the last sentence had been lost on him.

"That's all bunk," he said, shortly. "You can see that's all bunk, dad. Those armies that fought about churches, I guess they didn't forgive their enemies. Not by a long shot! They just killed them. And they must have got something out of it, or else what'd they fight for? That's bunk."

Jim turned wearily. His back ached and his legs ached and his head was throbbing. He wanted to say, "It's all bunk!" but he kept silent.

Bronson spoke reflectively, after a little: "She said, 'Dear Jesus,' you said. What'd she say that for?"

"That was a way—of addressing—her God. She used to say—other things. She used to say, 'Our Father Who art in Heaven.' She used to say, 'Heavenly Father.' And—many such things—"

"Did she?"

"Yes."

The night outside was very still. In the treetops there came from time to time the soft swishing of little breezes among the leaves. Presently Bronson delivered his decision:

"Well, I know what I'll say. I won't get down on the floor. I'll say: 'Create within me a clean heart, renew a right spirit within me. Make me as good a man as my father. Amen!'

They say 'Amen' always, don't they?" he questioned. "Is that right?"

Jim had sat up again. "Bronson!" he said, sharply.

"What's the matter?"

"You must never say that. You must never say that. You understand?"

"Why not? What's the matter of that?"

"*I'm* not a good man! If you're going to pray at all, pray decently. Pray to be better than that."

"Better than you?"

"You've got to be a lot better than I've ever been! You've got to—"

"Who? Me?"

"Yes, you. I haven't— You—"

"Rats!" commented Bronson, indulgently but positively. And he turned from his position on the edge of his bed, throwing himself full length on it, face downward, ready to sleep without removing his bathing suit. "Good night, dad!" he murmured.

"Bronson!"

"Go to sleep, father. You're tired. You better go to sleep."

After a little Jim began, "Bronson, you asleep?"

"No." The voice sounded sleepy.

"I—want to talk to you. We—may not have many chances —to talk this way again—"

"Why not?"

"I just want to say to you—that in a way—I do pray, you understand. I suppose everyone does, in a way. Sometimes you get so that you feel like nothing but a great prayer. I cry out —to God. I have to cry out—you might say—in the night. I

really pray, I suppose, then. But I don't get—the assurance—some people do—that my mother did."

"What do you pray for?" He was awake now, and curious.

"I pray—I pray to get my strength back—to be well again. I can't—it's very difficult for me to feel—weak, this way."

The boy had bounded out of bed and across the little porch to Jim's cot. He sat awkwardly down on the edge of it.

"But you're all right, father!" he cried, in alarm. "You're getting better!"

"Oh yes!" Jim lied, hastily. He couldn't endure the fear in the boy's voice. "Oh, I'm much better! I—you know how I slept this afternoon."

"You do look awful funny, sometimes, dad!"

"Well, I'm much better. I'm—getting much better. It wasn't— I never expected to get such a sleep at that time of day. I—I'm not worrying about myself, at all, you understand. Only—I'd like to get to work again. That's not what I pray for so much—"

"Honestly?"

"Yes, honestly. I—shouldn't have said that. That isn't really what I pray about—"

"What is it, then?"

"Bronson," Jim said slowly, "I pray for you—in a way."

"For me?"

"Yes."

"But—what do you pray for me for?"

"Bronson—I—it seems all I want in this life—to see you happy—and right—to see you settled—and using—all the possibilities of your life—so that you will be happiest."

"But, dad, you don't need to pray for that! I'm happy now. I'm all right. I'll be all right here with you."

"Bronson—that's it. It's this—separation—that drives me to cry out for you—and all—the unhappiness you've had. It's this—not having a normal home. Not having—the care you need. If you could have had—a home like mine—a father and a mother like mine! I see it all now. You aren't like—your mother. You're not akin to her—temperamentally. You're like my mother. I don't know why I didn't realize it before. She could have showed you how. You could have got along together so well. Perfectly! She was so strong. All subdued, all working together, her—possibilities, like an engine perfectly adjusted. A silent engine. And you—are red hot, son! always—overhot. Always wasting away in friction."

"Father, that was when I came. I—I guess I—didn't behave very well then. Don't you care about that. I'm all right now. I'm all right here. You don't need to worry about me."

"That's it, son. You're all right here. But you can't stay here. You've got to—live—under conditions—which aren't—exactly—favorable."

"You mean New York?"

"Yes. You have to go back and live there, and you know it."

Bronson rose impatiently from his father's bed.

"Dad, I thought I'd settled that. I told you plain I wasn't going back. I'm going to stay with you. I'm a peach when I'm here with you. Don't you say going back again. Don't you say that to *me*." He lay down again on his cot. Presently he spoke apologetically. "Of course I don't care if you do pray for me," he admitted. "But I'll be happy all right. You don't need to worry about that."

"I can't see how it's going to work for your happiness, unless you change toward your—circumstances. I can't see—it seems miraculous sometimes that any man is ever happy. I—

haven't been, often. I've made such a mess of my little life. You have to choose so soon, while you're young, when you don't realize the importance of your decisions, before you have a great deal of sense. And when you choose with all your wisdom, you choose unfortunately. And things—are going to be—harder for you even than they have been for me. You have—more passionate attitudes—a more—sensitive nature. I just cry out for you, son, to God—or—to life, just because I can't help it. And I get no relief from crying. But you—Bronson, you must look into these things carefully, as you get older. You might—find—capacities in you—like my mother's. I want you to remember what I am saying to you. She thought of God—as a friend to live with. She—was set apart—from the experience of a man like me—by spiritual passion. I see it now. It was her life, you understand. And it was a great life for her. And I see her all over again in you, Bronson, to-night. I see she would have been young—rather wildly—like you. In your circumstances I think she would have hated like you. And maybe you'll be older like her, all—well, I might say disciplined, working together silently, without friction, powerfully, like her!"

"Dad," said the lad, solemnly, when his father had finished speaking, "I feel good all over when I'm with you. When I'm with Aunt Emily and you, I just *feel good* all over."

"Do you, Bronson?" Jim asked, swallowing.

"Ye-ah," he replied, sleepily. "Ye-ah. That's why I'm staying with you."

And Jim, as he sat there in his bed, looking across the porch at the boy, heard him sleeping.

Chapter Nineteen

Bronson stood on the very edge of the bluff, his feet carefully placed against a young oak that grew out over the perpendicular, and his left arm securely embracing it as he leaned out over space. He was clothed, and it was apparent from his face that he still had that desired right spirit within him. He had just returned from a trip to the city in a neighbor's car, and for that occasion he had of his own accord put on a shirt and a pair of greasy khaki knickers and soiled white tennis shoes without stockings. Jim sat smoking in a chair which Bronson had brought out for him to the place he declared coolest. It was almost time to go down the long stairs and get into the boat and go up the river for dinner. As the boy talked to his father, he leaned out over the bluff and threw something over the river bed. He was, boylike, always throwing something at something. At this peaceful hour the ubiquitous missile seemed to be aimed at a riot of red-winged blackbirds too far out in the rushes to be annoyed by it. And Jim, watching him reflectively, was startled out of his reverie.

"Bronson!" he exclaimed, sharply, "what was that you threw?"

The lad turned and regarded his father with some surprise. The tone hadn't suited him. Still, he would be indulgent. That resolve was apparent in the complacent way he screwed up his lips. "A cart wheel," he answered, carelessly.

"A cart wheel? Do you mean a dollar?"

"Ye-ah. That's what they call them. Cart wheels. It's a good name, too. They weigh a ton."

"Do you mean you are throwing *money* at those birds?"

Bronson resented the implication. He turned and looked indignantly at his father. "Well, I'm not *hurting* them, you needn't think. They're too far away. They're always squawking and fighting among themselves, anyway. I just wanted to scare them."

Jim settled down limply into his chair. "But that was *money*, Bronson! You *knew* that, if you *don't* often see silver dollars in the East."

Annoyed as he was, Jim was touched by the boy's evident determination to be patient with his exacting and unreasonable father.

"Money?" he repeated, perplexed. "Well, of *course* it's money. But what did they want to go and give you a lot of old silver for? It'd wear out my pockets. Old cart wheels!" He bent down in his virtuous indignation, seeking a convenient missile. "That was the last one, anyway," he added, in explanation, as the pebble flew out into space.

"How many have you thrown?"

"I had two of them, I guess." The number of them was a matter of most sincere indifference to Bronson.

"Two dollars!" Jim sighed. Bronson turned away from the river and stood looking at him.

"What's the matter, dad?" he asked, curiously.

"I was just thinking. I was just—thinking."

"What were you thinking about?"

"I was thinking how long it took me to earn two dollars when I was your age."

"How long *did* it take you?"

"Why, it took me 'most all the summer. I think it took me

months. You can bet I never threw a penny away—I wouldn't throw a penny away now!"

"How'd you earn money?"

"How'd I earn money? I'll *tell* you how I earned money. I ran errands and I mowed people's lawns, and I delivered groceries in an express wagon, and I did everything! I used to take people's cows out to their pastures early mornings, before I went to school, and bring them back in the evening. I used to work all day Saturday for fifteen cents. I took every nickel home, and put it away, and waited for the dollars. It took months! D'you want to know what I did with the first dollar I ever earned?" Jim was getting thoroughly interested in his own recollection, and as he leaned forward and demanded this of his son, even a passing stranger would have asked for the information, so much of Jim's old charm showed in his smiling face.

"What did you do with it?"

"I bought a pair of shoes for Uncle Bob! By Jove! I'll never forget that morning! Saturday morning, it was, and the days were getting cold. Bob was about six, and I was ten or so. And I took him down to the store (mother must have selected the shoes beforehand) and I set down, and old Brown tried them on him. And I handed out the money for them. By Jove! I'll remember that till I die! I was a most important man in town that day." Jim chuckled. "I watched those shoes on Bob every day. They were my property and I was afraid he would wear them out!" And then, as Jim thought of his son, the chuckle died away from his eyes. "I don't like to see you wasting money, Bronson," he went on. "I—it doesn't seem right to me."

Bronson had settled himself on the sand in front of his father,

his arms clasped around his knees. He had been sitting perfectly still with his eyes narrowed for their intensest scrutiny. He had been trying to understand this recital.

"Dad," he began, hesitatingly, after a moment, "what did you buy Uncle Bob shoes for?"

"What did I buy him *shoes* for? I bought him shoes to keep his feet warm. The winter was coming on. If I hadn't who would have? Mother had been in bed all that fall. You can't imagine what a time we used to have to get along, Bronson. I suppose I bought my shoes and my clothes always after I was ten, and most of Bob's. Mother had the little house, and the people of the church, your grandfather's church, you know, always gave her things; not exactly a pension, you know, but things to eat. Some farmer would bring us a load of potatoes, and some one would give us hay for our cow. A man gave me a calf once, and so we had a cow. And we had hens. And the butcher used to give us some meat every Saturday. I'll tell you a funny thing about that, now, Bronson. You know my father was killed—you heard how it was, didn't you? He was waiting for the four-o'clock train to come in, and all the loafers uptown were gathered to watch, as usual. And just as it came the boy fell, and he jumped to save him. The platform was full of people, you understand. They picked up the body, and —fixed it up, and sent somebody to tell mother how it happened. But she was out in the yard with us children—Bob was just a baby. And she heard a little boy who played with me, who came running up the street, call out to another kid. He yelled, 'Say, did you know Jimmy Kenworthy's father's killed?' That's the way my mother heard it. And then they came up the street carrying my father. And they took him into the house, and mother never said a word. I've heard all this more than

once from the men who were there. And then—you know—the butcher came in, right into the room where mother was, carrying father's arm. And mother fainted. Well, that butcher had been too shocked to know what he was doing. That was all. He was almost stunned by what he had seen. But his wife was a very—er—a woman hard to get along with. And she felt he had disgraced her forever. She never let him forget it. And that old Dutchman—he was a stupid, good-natured sort of man, hearing eternally from his wife what a brute he had been—he used to insist on giving mother something every week. Every Saturday evening when he closed his shop he used to pretend he had something left over that wouldn't keep. But it would always be the best roast, or the best cutlets in the shop. And when mother was sick she'd tell me how to cook them. I was a crack cook." Suddenly a thought dawned across Jim's face. He hesitated. He considered his son and then he said: "I never thought of this before, Bronson, but that was the kind of woman my mother was. Everybody in town knew that man gave us meat. And no one—ever—misconstrued her accepting things. You understand? She was above that sort of possibility. It never occurred to me until this minute that there was anything—unusual in the situation. And besides, if we *were* poor, mother always had things to give to people. If she got a wagon load of pumpkins from some farmer, she'd have pumpkins to give to those who brought her—firewood or something. There wasn't much money in the town those days. It wasn't like it is now. And we had our garden and our fruit trees, and we laid away a cellarful of vegetables for winter. We had to, you can bet. And I used to sell milk to the neighbors. We got along, but you can bet we never threw money into a river."

Bronson seemed utterly at a loss to interpret this tale. He opened his lips as if to speak, and closed them again. He looked so bewildered that Jim asked:

"What's the matter?"

"Look here, dad! Do you mean—"

"Mean what?"

Bronson didn't want to say anything unkind. He hesitated. "Do you mean you were *poor?*" he asked, bluntly.

"Poor? Of *course* I mean we were poor! There's no doubt about that!"

"But we are *rich* now. *We* aren't poor."

"Your mother's rich, you mean." Jim spoke briefly. Seeing the boy still perplexed, he felt constrained to add, "The money is your mother's. I'm broke, myself."

"Do you mean you are *poor,* father?" There was awe in the lad's question.

"That's exactly what I mean. When I'm well, I earn enough money. I have always been able to earn—a good deal." Jim didn't want to discuss this, but the boy sitting there with his perplexed eyes upon him had to be satisfied. He humbled himself to go on.

"I have only what I make, you know, son, practicing law, and I haven't been able to work. After we were married some time, they found oil on land that an uncle of your mother's owned, a great deal of land that no one supposed was worth much. It was well managed. I'll say that for myself. After your mother had inherited it, I managed it. There's just no end to the money that came out of that deal."

The inevitable change had come over Bronson's face. "Yes!" he sneered. "She's got all the money, and she won't give you any! What's she got—"

"Bronson, don't speak that way! I won't have it! I tell you plainly that she would have—given me—enough. She wanted me to take—a great deal, when we separated. I couldn't, of course, I couldn't do that."

"Why couldn't you?"

"She was no longer my wife. I couldn't take money from her."

"You couldn't?"

"Certainly not!" said Jim. And he saw the lad's mind spring out and see the act as a hungry animal sees food.

"All right." Bronson spoke deliberately. "If you can't, I can't. I won't take her dirty old money." Jim shrank from this irrevocable decision.

"Don't talk nonsense," he said, sharply, irritated by his mistake. "It's a different matter altogether with you."

"Why is it?"

"She's your mother. There is no reason—"

"She is not! I *told* you that! I *told* you she's no mother of mine. I have divorced her."

"Bronson, don't be ridiculous. You can't divorce a mother."

"I've divorced mine!"

"You haven't—any comprehension of the situation, or of money, or of anything—practical. That money will be legally yours. Not while she lives, but eventually, and it will go on increasing for generations, likely. It's safe, and it's almost beyond realization what it may amount to after a generation or two. It will naturally be left to you, if you behave."

"I never *will,* behave, then! I'll never touch it. I've decided that."

There was no use arguing with him. Jim sat still, watching his face hardened with a savage resentment. All that he could

do for the boy now was to preserve his gaiety of mood as long as possible, the gaiety that should have been his naturally. He sat with his face turned sullenly away from Jim, his hand playing nervously with the sand he let slip through his fingers.

"It's time to go to dinner," Jim remarked at last, looking at his watch.

They both rose. Bronson put his hands into his pockets and pulled out all the money he had there, feeling to make sure that none was left. He gave it to his father.

"Do you want this, or shall I throw it into the river?" he asked, shortly.

"Bronson!" Jim protested.

"I say—do you want this?" The passionate lad lifted his arm as if he would throw what was in his hand straight across to the far bank.

"Bronson, don't do that! Don't throw it!"

"Take it, then!" They stood facing each other dramatically. The boy's lips quivered.

"Give it to me. I'll keep it for you—"

There were a five and two one-dollar bills. Jim folded them away. They went down the steps to the river. Jim took his place in the boat. Bronson, as usual, after untying it, jumped in with such a heavy awkwardness that it thrashed about like a caught and resisting fish. He put his hands to the oars and bent toward his father.

"Bill's poor," he said. "But he's all right. He never has any money but what he gets from Veile, for working. He told me so. *I* can drive a car. *I* can work in a garage. I could stay and work for Uncle Bob if they'd let me alone."

"I thought Uncle Bob had been paying you wages. I thought

you had come to some agreement—" Jim wanted to get back to a tolerable subject.

"Sure he's going to pay me. He said I earned as much as any of them. He's keeping my money for me. I'm never going—"

"I remember how Bob used to try to earn money," Jim hastened to begin. And he went on embroidering his story, but with no great success. Bronson listened, but with his mind on his sore. Jim could almost see him feeling it as one feels an aching tooth. The sullenness had not yet left his face when they arrived at the farmhouse.

It stood on a low, sandy hill, a small unpainted house, with an old, sagging unpainted barn. Both buildings were weathered a silver shining gray. Just in front of the door of the house a group of high lindens shaded a crude bench. It was there that Jim and Bronson usually sat from the time of their arrival until Mrs. Siegel, red-faced from the cook stove, came to the door and called them to dinner. And now on the bench sat two men, smoking, and obviously rather out of temper. It was the first occasion upon which Jim and Bronson had not been the sole guests, and Jim realized that the boy was scowling at the intruders.

And then he recognized one of them, a well-known lawyer from Chicago whom he used sometimes to meet at this farmhouse some years before, when they used both to come for fishing. He was something of a joke among fishermen of those parts because he maintained even in the wilds an old-maidish neatness of appearance and a unique and studied correctness of array. Jim repressed a smile as he noticed the smartness of the small gray Vandyke beard and the daintily polished nails of the hand held out to welcome him. The

immaculate gentleman introduced his companion. The companion had a round face made for joviality. But it was red now, and sweaty, and not very clean, and impatient, and unshaven. His gray sweater was too loose about his neck, but it stretched out tight across his abundant abdomen. Jim introduced Bronson, but the two men were so full of the account of their misfortune that they scarcely noticed him.

They spluttered out their annoyances with an eye on the door from which dinner was to be announced. They were stuck. They were held up. They had gone up the river at dawn, and their engine had died down before they had got to their destination. They had been working over it all the morning without any success. They had managed to get down here for dinner, thank the Lord! They were famished. They hadn't had any breakfast. They would have to wait all the blankly blank afternoon till some one came from the city. They knew the tricks of that garage they had phoned to. Roberts wouldn't send anybody out to help them till all his other work was done for the day. They would be lucky if they got home by bedtime. The unshaven man swore on, the immaculate gentleman commenting exquisitely but with feeling. Suddenly Bronson interrupted them impatiently:

"I'll fix you up. But I won't do it till after dinner."

The neat man was sitting next to Jim on the bench, and the fat man beyond him, and Bronson on the other side of his father. They both leaned forward, at that remark, and looked at the boy. His face was quite earnest. His knickers were very greasy and his long bare legs ended in a pair of discolored tennis shoes that he had destroyed in the week he had worn them. A smile dawned slowly over the face of the lawyer, and the fat man grinned. And he went on grinning.

But the lawyer assumed a courteous expression, and said, politely:

"I'm afraid it's too difficult. The tinker up at Gridley's has been working on it all morning. He towed us down here. He couldn't get a spark out of it. He was the one that telephoned for us. At least I *hope* he did. He promised to. You remember Gridley, Kenworthy? He does what he can, always, but he's really not worth much in a pull." And turning to Jim, he went on without giving the boy a thought. Perhaps it seemed to him kinder not to pay much attention to a lad so disreputably arrayed.

"I'll fix your boat after dinner, I tell you." Bronson spoke emphatically—kindly, but firmly, as one might speak to a stubborn child.

And Jim hastened to say, trying to avert he couldn't tell what storm: "The boy—engines are his hobby, you know. He'll—he'll see if he can do anything."

The lawyer muttered conventional thanks. Just then, red and sweating, Mrs. Siegel called them to dinner. When they had finished, they came out to the seat in the shade, and lit their cigars. The Chicago lawyer spoke to Bronson indulgently.

"You want to have a look at it?" he asked, waving his hand toward the pier where the stubborn launch was. His manner implied that since from the bench where he sat he would be able to keep his eye on the boat, he wouldn't mind allowing a small boy, the son of an old acquaintance, to have a look at it. Bronson replied firmly:

"I told you I'd *fix* it for you!"

And he walked down toward the river and left the three men talking about the war. The fat man had a son in the navy. The neat gentleman had a daughter driving for the Red Cross

in France, absolutely contrary to his wish. He couldn't help it. She just went. He hadn't been able to do any work, he hadn't even been able to sleep, till he came up here. They smoked and they talked, forgetting the lad, until, in about ten minutes, what was that—chug, chug, chug—their engine started?

"Well, I'll be damned!" ejaculated the fat man. The three of them had risen abruptly and made for the river. There was Bronson sitting in the driver's seat in the old, unsteady racing launch, and grinning most complacently.

"Nothing the matter with your old tub," he remarked.

"Nothing the matter with it? I worked five hours straight at the thing this morning."

"You needn't have."

There was a moment of silence.

"What did you do to it?"

"I told you I'd fix it for you." Bronson was quite the master.

"Good Lord!" said the lawyer.

Bronson regarded him with condescension, and Jim chuckled inwardly. After all, both men had dismissed his son very lightly. The boy might have acted a great deal worse. The lawyer turned and looked at Jim, most significantly lifting his eyebrows, so that Jim thrilled with fatuous pride. The fat man standing planted sturdily with his feet wide apart was studying Bronson.

"Well, I didn't suppose for a minute you could do it."

"Huh!" replied Bronson, expressively. His intonation allowed no one to imagine that he cared in the least for anything which that person supposed.

They made ready to get away. They saw that Jim had only a rowboat.

"We'll take you down," the fat man said. "Come in with us."

Jim began to murmur a protest. He wouldn't trouble them. It wasn't far. But Bronson was of another mind.

"Here's a rope," he said. "Tie us on behind." He never budged from his seat. The fat man obediently "tied them on behind." Jim watched the proceedings with misgiving. He knew the history of that old racing launch and he mistrusted the sharp-prowed narrow thing. It seemed absurd to tie a flat-bottomed boat to it.

"You're sitting there?" he asked of Bronson, indicating the rowboat.

"Me?" asked Bronson. I'm driving."

That settled it. Jim shrank from giving an order in the presence of strangers which he had every reason to suppose would be ignored. After all, the two other men had gone up the river in the racer. Apparently they had no misgivings about letting the boy drive. If he was able to do what they had not been able to do, they seemed never to doubt his ability to do what they could do. They made ready, they took their places, without a word of protest.

And then they were off—most suddenly and startlingly off. In the commotion Jim saw the manicured hands of the lawyer grabbing at the sides of the boat wildly. "We can all swim!" he thought. He shut his eyes for a moment not to see the green torn waters swirling about. The channel was very narrow just there, and presently it narrowed more. "It isn't far!" Jim found himself saying. Bronson was turning abruptly to avoid a fallen green tree which lay halfway across the river, and Jim, lurching to one side, saw the top branches of it slap violently against the lawyer's face.

"Shut her off there!" he heard the fat man gasp.

"Who's driving this?" Bronson growled.

The rowboat had apparently hit a deadhead. The old racer had grazed something. They were tearing along at a fearful rate. They were leaping and bounding toward home. They were driving into the place where the river bent at right angles, where they must turn from it into the deserted old river bed. The launch seemed to be going in circles—into the little blue channel that led home. Motor boats had gone up it before, certainly. But few had ever whizzed along with such splashing, wave-lifting force, with such a mad scattering of young fishes, and noisy crashing against the slight piers along it. It seemed to Jim that they must have been going sixty miles an hour when they arrived immediately with a capsizing lurch at their own landing place. He refrained with gritted teeth from speaking.

So did the two strangers. They seemed dazed. They seemed not quite able to understand what had happened to them so suddenly, why they had experienced such unmanly and frightful sensations. The driver had proved that he knew more about motor boats than they did. They both sprang out eagerly on to the pier. They seemed to enjoy something solid beneath their feet. The lawyer in his nervousness bent down and began to untie the towing rope.

"Look here, Salter," he began, to his companion, "we've got to pay the boy for this. We ought to pay him." Jim protested futilely.

"The Lord knows when we would have got off, if the youngster hadn't lent us a hand," the fat man said. "We'd have been stuck till evening. We'd have had to give them a ten at least." He put his hand to his pocket. "Here you are."

He handed Bronson a ten-dollar bill.

Jim tried to catch his son's eye. To his amazement, Bronson, flushed with excitement and satisfaction, reached out his

hand and took the money, and said in a voice which an old and servile waiter might have used when receiving a tip:

"Thank you very much, sir!"

The lawyer went on murmuring that certainly the boy deserved the money. They could stop now and countermand the order to the city garage at the next telephone. They would get home in good time yet. He hoped he would see Jim again. He lit a cigar and took his place in the launch. The fat man stood firmly planted on the pier, still somewhat confused, stroking the back of his head and eying Bronson thoughtfully.

"You drive in the races?" he asked him, respectfully.

"Who? Me?" Bronson was genuinely surprised. "No. I never got a chance to drive a boat before."

The way those two men abstained that moment from comment was conspicuous. They adjusted themselves blinking to this information. The fat man all but spoke. Most boys would have been alarmed by the expression that came over his face. Then he glanced at Jim and shut his mouth violently. He exchanged a significant look with his friend in the boat and joined him without a word. The lawyer, however, made his farewells politely, and Jim and Bronson together stood watching them turn cautiously in the narrow channel and make their way toward the river.

At the top of the bluff Bronson spoke. He was radiant. "Did you see *that,* dad! I *told* them I'd fix their old tub, and they just *smiled* at me! Did you see them? I'll teach them to smile at me." And he turned two very long handsprings.

At the veranda Jim spoke. "Bronson," he said, with decision, "that was a very—unwise thing—a very rash thing for you to do. I don't like that sort of foolshiness."

"Foolishness? What sort of foolishness?"

"It wasn't right of you to pretend that you could drive a boat of that sort. You should have—"

"*Pretend* I could drive a boat! I like *that!* I *can* drive a boat. Didn't I do it?"

"It was foolish of you. You know very well there are deadheads in the river. You know it was dangerous. You didn't even go slowly, or carefully."

"Gee! It was swell! I'm going to get a racer. Isn't there one we could get some place, for a while?" And then he put his hand into his pocket.

"I got money, too," he grinned.

"And that's another thing. I don't think you should have taken that money. You didn't work ten minutes at that job, and you took ten dollars."

Bronson laughed for sheer glee.

"But if I'd been as much of a nut as those two, I'd have worked five hours and then phoned to the garage," he chuckled.

"But that was a friend of mine, an acquaintance. You can't take money that way."

"Bill does." Bronson was absolutely unruffled by his father's reproach. "If you are going to earn money, you've got to take it, if you're a chauffeur."

All that afternoon the boy exulted in his sense of power. He was full of delightful boyishness. Jim watched him almost with awe. He couldn't remember when he had been so stirred emotionally before. He didn't take a sleep because he didn't want to miss an hour of this mood of his son's. And as they sat together on the edge of the bluff in the evening Jim cried to him involuntarily, from his heart:

"Bronson, when you go back now you must write me often! You must write me *often,* now, son!"

"Go back where?"

"When you go back to—New York."

The boy laughed.

"What you laughing at?" Jim asked, somewhat sharply.

Bronson turned to him affectionately. "Aw, dad, now don't you get *sore* at me!" he begged, still grinning. "I can't *help* laughing. You've got the funniest old dome on you! Well, you *have!* You can't get anything through it! I bet if I've told you once I've told you twenty times I'm not going back there. And you begin all over again just as if I hadn't told you. You make me laugh."

This was undoubtedly true. The strange inability of the father was a source of indulgent mirth to the son. But to a son so precious, so clumsily affectionate, that Jim could only gasp.

"Bronson," he ventured to begin after a minute, "I'm sorry. You know I'm sorry. But I've got to take you back. You make it very difficult for me, this way, son."

Bronson considered this point obligingly. "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do, dad. I won't get you into trouble. Do you think I'd go and get you into trouble? I'll go back so they can't blame you for anything, and *then* I'll run away. What makes you worry about me? Don't you think I can take care of myself? I got ten dollars in my pocket right now. And it didn't take ten minutes to earn it, either. Gee, dad, look at those ducks! *Look* at those ducks! Did you ever see so many?" And the boy's quick interest in the flock alighting beautifully on the sunset-colored river drove the insignificant subject of the future entirely from his mind. The possibility of his not being able to master all circumstances had never yet entered his head.

They watched the birds for some time. Jim could see the boy's mind reverting to the satisfactory episode of the strangers.

"That old fathead thought I was twenty-one, dad," he volunteered, presently.

"What makes you think he did?"

"He asked me if I drove in the races. I'd have to be twenty-one to drive in the races, wouldn't I?"

"I don't know."

"I bet I would."

"I suppose he was just trying to guess how old you are."

"Ye-ah! And he guessed twenty-one, or many more, even."

Obviously the old fathead was a very gratifying old fathead, a fathead to chuckle over.

Chapter Twenty

BRONSON's gaiety of mood lasted through one hot day after another. He was continuing to be an absolutely satisfactory boy, the most charming boy imaginable, Jim thought, stirred throughout by his pleasure in him. He lavished upon his father splashes of the most touching solicitation with a spontaneity which forbade Jim attributing them to the sudden recollection of Emily's instructions. This was partly because Jim studiously avoided mentioning his former wife. Even a pronoun referring to her could upset Bronson. Jim gloated all his waking hours over this newly established relationship. And for the first time in years he was naturally waking up in the morning with a start of pleasant anticipation. He had never so much enjoyed before being a father. It was almost like being in love again. It blew sudden unhoped-for gales of satisfaction over him. There had been a time in his life, too, when he secretly enjoyed his reputation of being a good talker. And one day his son sent, as it were, new strength coursing through him by saying simply, when Jim suggested they go fishing,

"No, I don't want to go fishing. You can't talk when we're fishing."

And then there was the delightful occasion of a letter to Bob and Emily. Jim had been writing to them briefly, realizing their anxiety, that he and the boy were getting along better than he had ever hoped they might. And one morning as he was beginning a letter he said:

"When shall I say you'll be back, Bronson?"

"At Uncle Bob's?"

"Yes."

"When is it I have to go—I have to leave you? I suppose I'll have to go back and get my clothes?"

"Of course you'll have to go back. Don't you want to?"

"Oh ye-ah. I suppose I'll have to. But let's not go till the last day."

Jim was surprised.

"I thought you'd want to go back before this."

"Did you? Well, it's all right there. I like it there. But I'd have to go down and work in the garage. I'd have to help Uncle Bob if we went back. We wouldn't get any time to talk much, like we do here, dad." Bronson was engaged in cutting the tops off his old tennis shoes with a pocket knife. It seemed difficult to get the resulting slippers even round the top. He held one of them at arm's length, and squinted at it critically. "Ain't it the truth?" he asked.

It was the truth that Jim Kenworthy no longer found life bitter. He had been preferred to a garage. He had been preferred to Emily. He had never dared hope for such high appreciation. And he had occasion to say to himself that it wasn't just his paternal pride that found the boy delightful. It was plain that the neighbors liked him. Jim was walking that morning along the path at the top of the bluff toward the place where the boys of the neighboring huts went swimming daily, when he came upon a woman who turned abruptly from peering down upon the naked splashers.

"Oh!" she said, apologizing confusedly, "I was just looking down to see if that big boy was still there with the children. The one they call Bronson. My little boy is there, and I feel so safe when he is with him. He seems so trustworthy."

"That's my boy." Jim couldn't refrain from saying that.

"Oh, is it? Well, he's a *nice* boy. I feel perfectly safe as long as he is there. I get anxious when my son doesn't come back soon. I just came to peek down. I didn't want him to see me. Boys think it's so silly for people to worry about them, don't they?"

"What a nice little person that is!" thought Jim as he went on.

A few days after this Bronson came trudging back down the sunny, sandy path which led to the mail box on the main road, and into the growth of slender trees which shaded the hut. He wasn't whistling or jumping or handspringing. He came along soberly, reading a letter, the first his father had seen him have all the summer. He handed Jim his mail, and went and sat down on the bench, and began to re-read his letter. He read it all carefully, and sat looking out across the river. From time to time Jim glanced cautiously up from the morning paper. Presently Bronson rose and came to him. He stood irresolutely in front of him.

"Look at here, dad. I got a letter from Bill. What'll I do? I don't know what I'd better do now."

"What's the news?"

"Mrs. Veile has gone to France. Gee! I hope they torpedo her!"

"Oh, Bronson!"

"Bill wants me to go to a school. She ain't coming back."

"What school?"

"He says he's got me a good school. Look at this." He handed Jim the letter, and sat down, waiting earnestly for his father's comment.

Jim took the typed letter curiously. It seemed an extraordinary thing that the lad's mother should be writing him through her chauffeur. The letter was extremely brief and dry.

It began by stating that Mrs. Veile had had to go to France for a long time on behalf of the Red Cross. The school that had been chosen—it didn't say by whom—was the best school Bill ever saw. There were only twenty boys in it, and all kinds of swell shops to work in. And the teachers knew more in a minute than Bill knew in a year. If Bronson came back and settled down and behaved himself, he would be ready for Boston Tech. in two or three years. Sooner, even, if he used his senses. He was to be at the school the first day of September. Bill had been in Washington with Veile all the summer. It was a hot hole. He would be in Washington all the fall, likely, and he would come and see Bronson at the school at least once a month, and sometimes they would go to New York together for a day and look around, if Bill didn't go into the army before then. "Yours truly," it remarked in closing, "Wm. Daniels."

From the first line Jim had been thinking: "This is a godsend! This is providential!"

"What more can you want than that?" he asked, looking up at Bronson.

"Nothing. If she's torpedoed."

Jim wouldn't condescend to answer that.

"Here's a school designed for boys—of your turn of mind, apparently. You won't have—to see—anybody—you don't want to. You'll have a chance to make good. An excellent chance, it appears. You've never been in a school. It'll be like a new life, Bronson! You can just go on enjoying yourself—being happy, like you are here, and getting ready—for anything you've got—ability for. It would be like going exploring, almost."

"Exploring what?"

"It would be an adventure for you, a discovering. Bronson, I think you haven't any conception—of your possibilities—in one way. You—have—unfortunately got into such—habits—of insolence—of making people—dislike you—that you make yourself wretched. You don't know how easily you could make friends—good friends—how much lots of people—would like you, and admire you, I might say—if you'd give them half a chance. Suppose you'd go down to that school determined to—get along—to get everything out of it you could. You—could have everyone there on your side, trying to explain things, trying to help you along. You've got certain—talents. And people are always interested—teachers are—in anyone who has—unusual ability in their line. If only you'd be—like you are here—like you are with Uncle Bob and Aunt Emily. Think what you might do there!"

"Um!" commented Bronson, interested but unconvinced.

"Besides, son, in a way, your—place in life—is indicated by your interests—more clearly than most people's. It's plain you are to be interested in mechanical things, in technical things. It isn't as if you didn't know whether you were to be an artist or a lawyer, or what. Your mind has started down its path, so to speak. You'll be an—engineer or something of that sort." Jim spoke very earnestly, and, having finished, looked earnestly at Bronson, seated on the ground before him.

"I don't know," said the boy, slowly. He spoke as seriously as his father. "Maybe I might be a minister."

Jim gave a sudden chuckle of surprise, in spite of himself, and tried to cover the fact with an apology.

"You don't think I could be a minister, do you?" Bronson asked, suspiciously. He was hurt.

"Oh yes, certainly I think you could be, if—you wanted to.

It doesn't take any great— 'Most anybody *could* be a *minister,* if—it seemed the best thing. I hadn't thought of you—being that."

"I *could* be one."

Jim considered him with a straight face, and then turned to the letter.

The adroitness of it impressed him. The boy had really won out. His mother had recognized the hopelessness of his situation in her house. She knew his determination not to come back to her. She withdrew gracefully, not surrendering. She had to go to France. She would get him back into her control without seeming to have capitulated. She had chosen her bait cunningly, and got this man to dangle it before the boy. Yet she had given up trying to treat with him directly. After all, it must have been as humiliating for her as it was miserable for the child. She must have been often at the end of her stubborn wit.

The boy took the letter and read it again.

"It's the best possible thing to happen, Bronson," Jim spoke with conviction and with caution. He wanted to guard against a passionate rejection of the proposal. He wanted some way to have Bronson feel that he had chosen that school alone, with all his might. So he waited a bit, and then added, carelessly:

"Of course, you're the one to decide."

Bronson sighed presently. A moment later he said, wistfully, "Bill wants me to get to work and amount to something."

Jim felt an impulse of resentment. Who was this Bill that his desires for the boy weighed more heavily than his father's? Immediately he reproved his smallness of mind. He ought to be thankful there was some one who had influence with his son. He recalled another bit of this unknown man's counsel to the

lad. "You'd better go out and see your father. You might like him!" That had seemed absurd when Bronson related it. But now it seemed a bit of wisdom and justice for which he ought to be grateful. After all, who else in that home would have said as much for a rejected father? He began thinking about Bill. He resolved to make his acquaintance when he went East, if he had luck. To be sure, it was this man who had given the lad such—unfortunate—information about his mother, in the first place. Still, that had been accidental. He had probably done the best he could under the circumstances. And he was the only person in whose presence the boy ever was, in that New York home, anything less than a young monster.

Bronson stretched out on the sand, his arms under his head, his knees drawn up, staring at the lace pattern of the leaves above him. As he lay thus meditatively, from the river below rose very distinctly the shouts of some young voices. He paid no attention to them.

"The boys are calling you," Jim remarked.

"I know it."

"You might answer!" Jim suggested.

"Let 'em holler. It won't hurt them."

This was undeniable. Bronson didn't move.

The voices were persistent as they were shrill. It became apparent that their owners were climbing the steep stairs and were about to appear over the top of the bluff, a fact without significance to the lad they sought.

"Good morning, boys," said Jim, quickly. But they pounced upon his son. The three oldest, about ten, ready for swimming, demanded indignantly if he hadn't heard them. A smaller

child followed them, whom the climb had left breathless but eager.

"Clear out!" replied Bronson, shortly. "I ain't got time to go swimming."

"Come along!" they protested.

"Clear out of here! Can't you see I'm busy? I said I'd come this afternoon. Skedaddle! Trot along! Don't you be always bothering me when I've got work to do."

Jim watched the boys' surprise. Bronson hadn't stirred from his comfortable position. They stood reluctant, disappointed.

"Hey you, Peter!" Bronson called, good-naturedly, to the smallest and latest one, who was gazing down at him a few steps away. "*You* can see I'm busy, can't you? *You* got sense, anyway. Now you run right back down our steps. I'll come and take you all in this afternoon. Hurry up!"

They departed toward the stairs.

"Come again, boys," Jim said to them, his voice rather protesting against Bronson's shortness. "Watch your step there."

Bronson gave a little laugh. "Gotta make kids mind," he explained. And then he sat up, suddenly earnest. "I'll tell you what I'll do, dad," he began.

"Don't decide quickly," Jim begged.

"I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll go to that school, and I'll be a peach. I'll work like hell—if—"

"If what?"

Bronson's face twitched.

"If you'll fight for me," he blurted out.

"*Fight* for you?"

"*Fight* for me! *Get* me? I don't want to run away. I don't

want to hide. I'd rather stay with you at Uncle Bob's than go into the navy."

"My dear boy, I don't know what you mean! There's nothing I'd like better than that, if it could be arranged for you!"

"You *fight* for me. You take me away from—there. You let me go into court. You let me tell the judge about her. I know how they do. They let the children decide. I read in a paper where they let a little girl seven years old choose whether she would live with her mother or her father. Sometimes they let them choose when they're little, and sometimes when they're big. Get them to let me choose, father. I'll do anything."

Jim felt the tears rising to his eyes.

"I don't want to make you sick, dad. I don't want you to feel bad. But why can't you fight for me? Why can't you get me?"

Jim had turned away suddenly. After a moment he faced his child, and said, steadily: "I'll tell you why I haven't, Bronson. I haven't the money. These cases—take a great deal; they cost —very much. I had to let—the decision stand as it was—because I had nothing to go on with. I—sold even my life insurance—to get you for six weeks. Your mother—is not so limited. She—would go on—appealing forever. She would never—stop. Bronson—I haven't the— I can't. I'm helpless in the matter!"

"But I just want to tell the judge. Why does that cost much? I could tell the judge I wanted to stay with you. That's easy. That isn't anything!"

"Bronson, you don't understand. You don't imagine what a legal array—the other side would assemble. I know. I've been there. She would never—let you choose, son."

"Let's get money! Can't we get money? Uncle Bob would give us money. Bill would help me."

"My dear boy, all that Uncle Bob could give, or your aunt,

all that Bill ever earned—wouldn't be a drop in the bucket. You mustn't think—I haven't gone all over this. I'm a lawyer. You mustn't think I haven't—exerted all the pressure, everywhere, I could. Bronson, I tell you—I thought—I thought—of suicide—when I heard this last decision. It seemed to me I couldn't live—I needn't live—I was—so helpless, so—useless to you. And if I could get well—again—entirely—all I could earn in a year would be nothing. What's fifteen thousand dollars a year—compared—with what the other side would spend? My dear son, if you are going to be anything, if you are going to amount to anything, you will have to do it without any help—from me. I'm no good to you. I can't do anything!"

"How do you know, dad? Maybe there's some way. Maybe I could find a way. Anyway, I could run away."

"But why run away, Bronson? Why not run into this school? There's nothing to—make you—unhappy there. It's all suited to you!"

"Dad, don't look that way! I'll go to that school. I'll go, anyway, if you want me to, if you'll just try—to get me. Maybe you can, some way. I'll go to that school, if you'll try. And if you'll let me go back alone."

"Go back alone! Oh, Bronson, you don't know what a load off my mind it would be if you go there and try! You know, it would make a difference to me, to think of you there studying well. It would—help me physically. I—would have a better chance—to get back to normal if—I could be—comfortable about you. It would—pull me down—it would—make me lose all the time—to have you running away, alone—not knowing where you are. But if you go to that school, with your mind made up—"

"I'll go, then, if you want me to. Only you've got to let me go alone, I say."

"But why alone? I—intended taking you back. I thought we could travel together."

"No. I don't want—to travel even with you, dad. I want—to go all alone. Without any—policeman—or nurse. I'll just walk into that school with all my baggage, and say, 'Here I am!' to them. Will you let me, dad?"

"Why, yes, of course, if it will give you any—satisfaction. If you'd rather."

"Ye-ah. I want to. I'll write to Bill, and he'll come and meet me in New York, but I won't have him go out to the school with me, either."

Jim said, "Maybe he couldn't come, just now, to New York."

"I'll bet you a thousand dollars he'll come if I ask him to. I want to tell him—I'm going to tell him you do, *too,* know—I am, *too,* your boy."

"Bronson—" Jim hesitated to begin.

"Well, what?"

"If I were you, I wouldn't tell Bill that. I wouldn't discuss that with anyone. It's just between you and me. If you go back happy, he'll understand."

"All right," said the boy, thoughtfully. He continued to look earnestly up at Jim. Then he said, simply, "Anyway, I don't suppose he would understand. He hasn't seen Aunt Emily."

"My dear son, Aunt Emily isn't the only—proof. There are—trustworthy and honorable women everywhere—among the maids in that house—everywhere. You mustn't conclude"—and at the knowing smile that passed over Bronson's face he hastened to add, "But I dare say there may be men who have

never—come across—even one convincing one—unfortunate men—"

"Hmm!" commented Bronson.

Jim sighed and changed the subject.

"But the school—there's this to be thought of. You're fourteen now. It will be only a few years till you're old enough to choose, at most. Suppose you start right in the school. Suppose you study, and do well, and behave as you've been behaving this last week. All the teachers would—see what was in you. If you get a character—if some one like them, outsiders, would be willing and—able to say that you were a—reliable boy—and a—worthy boy—of unusual character and common sense, it's—just conceivable—that you might get a chance to choose sooner. I'll go into it again. I'll see what can be done. I haven't much hope, you understand. But it's not long, now, till you will be old enough. And I think it likely—that Mrs. Veile—won't be back—for some time. I dare say she will arrange—pleasant things for you. You'll—travel about in your holidays—and see the things—"

"I'll travel out here and see you!"

"That's what I'd like, of course. And even—outside these six weeks that are allowed you—I dare say—we can sometimes manage to see each other. I'll stay in New York—awhile, anyway. At least, we know each other now, and if you only wrote me, and sent me good reports from school, I would be so—much—happier. Bronson, I think you could just—dazzle those teachers there by your—good behavior, if you made up your mind to!"

"I will, dad. You bet your life I will. I'll knock their eye out the first week I'm there. You'll see what I'll do. I'll show them."

Jim slept that afternoon like a light-hearted and weary child, and he woke refreshed. He turned on his cot and saw Bronson sitting at the little supper table, writing a letter, laboriously, his tongue out at the corner of his mouth.

"I feel better already," he said to himself. And then he said it aloud.

"Because I'm going to school, you mean?" questioned his son. "That's funny. Here's the letter." Jim had suggested that Bronson write at once to Bill. It was one of the most gratifying letters Jim remembered ever seeing.

"Dear Bill," it said, "I'm going to work like hell in your school. I'm a peach out here. My father is all right. You meet me at the Penn. Station the last day of August, in the morning. I'll let you know when later. Yours truly, J. B. Kenworthy."

Chapter Twenty One

EMILY had reason to examine her soul in those few days between Jim's and Bronson's return from Michigan and their departure for the East. She examined it thoughtfully, with upbraidings and remonstrances. Surely she wasn't so small—surely she wasn't so mean-minded, she protested sharply to her conscience. But if not, why this depression? Had not the thing she had wanted most come to pass? Had not Jim someway found his son, so really that—he was altogether a different man? Even that old, hazardous relationship to her had given place to something new. Well, wasn't that exactly what she had wanted? Hadn't she wanted only that she might be of some use to Jim at the time of his need? Why was she so—so—well, at least depressed, to see that the current of his life had turned from her to his son. What had she wanted but that Jim might be able to talk to her freely and naturally about what was in his mind—for his own relief? Hadn't she almost prayed that the boy would show to his father something of what she and Bob had seen in him? And now Jim's feelings toward her had changed, some way. He was securely distant from her. He was unafraid. He was sure of something. He sat by her and talked of the boy, freely. He told her a great deal about what they had done while they were away together. He apologized for the child to her as she had before apologized for the child to him.

"You were right, Emily, as usual," he had said to her at the first opportunity. "Bronson—was—full of wild ideas. That was the worst of these—separations. I hadn't an idea of the—stuff

—he had got into his head. He thought—because I didn't come and steal him away, as people do in Hearst's papers, that I didn't want him. He didn't feel—sure of a welcome here when he came. If you hadn't won his heart right away, I don't know what would have happened! It was all your—kindness that got things straightened out. Complexes, they call them, don't they? He was chock-full of them. But it's all right now, thanks to you! I'd never have had patience with him. I never could have stood his—insolence—at first there, when he was—under his—delusions, you might call them. The way you—handled him—not knowing—was just so exactly right; if you had seen into his mind, you couldn't have—acted more—just as he needed you to act. It seems—even the things you said to him the first day— Why, Emily, he remembered your very words! And they—just—made all the difference in him! He told me word for word everything you have said to him—half the summer. He quoted you continually. And Bob, too."

"But it's just splendid, Jim!" she had repeated. "He seems so ambitious now. *You've* done that. How did you get him so—willing to go to school? I shouldn't have thought he would like the idea of a school so much. His mother must—understand him—better than I had imagined she did, to manage him so well in this matter. Because you know he *is* a—rather hard boy to manage."

"You know— Emily, I intended to tell you. Under the circumstances I suppose it's only natural. But it's as well, I've found out—not to mention his other home to him—or his mother. He's naturally sensitive—about his position—in the divorce."

"Jim, I realized that at once. I saw plainly he was on the defensive. He was afraid I might criticize his mother. That's

very chivalrous of him, I must say. I can't forgive myself for suggesting he write to her that day. Instinctively he resented —a—stranger like me interfering in his relationship with her."

"Of course she has difficulties with him, Emily. I can see that. He doesn't—get along awfully well, I imagine, with her husband. And we know what he can do, don't we, when he makes up his mind to be disagreeable. He has it down to a science. It's—a most unfortunate situation. When I think of my own bringing up, of mother, and then think of the way he's handled by the law—"

"You needn't regret that too much, Jim. You needn't think too much about your own bringing up, for, after all, there wasn't more than one chance in a thousand that your son would have been brought up as well as you were. I've just come to the conclusion that a child's bringing up isn't anything that's done to him, or any social conditions that are thrown around him. It's just what his parents *are!* Nothing else. And your mother was rare, you know. You know very well there isn't one in a thousand like her. And still, look at Bob! *He* never appreciated her. He never really—thinks about her much."

"You said he was like her, at first, I remember, Emily. I see it now. I didn't see it then. Not at all. He is the last child in the world to be subjected to the indignity, you might say, of a divided home. I see from what he has told me that he—that his mother—is at her wit's end sometimes. It must be—hard on her to have him—so out of hand—so wild—at times. Of course he—resents her authority over him. I can see that. Emily, Bronson wants to come here—to live with you! He feels more at home here. He wants me—to—to take the matter into court again, so that he may be allowed to choose—in what home he will live. I hadn't the heart to say to him—that you

hadn't undertaken to give him a permanent home. He never doubted—that you would like to have him here permanently, I mean. He seemed to think—"

"Well, I must say, Jim, he shows more—insight than *you* do. It's not kind of you to suppose this isn't his permanent home. I should think you *would* be ashamed to suggest that to him. I haven't heard anything that made me so happy for a long time. He just *feels* that he belongs here with us. That's the very essence of gratitude—more than you have, Jim."

"Emily, it's nothing light to undertake to—have control—entire control of that boy! He's behaving well now, because no one is exercising any—authority. But if he was to live here permanently, even in his school holidays, some one would have to— You know, yourself, we could never tolerate some of his—habits. The responsibility would be mine, legally, but you would have—to manage him, to help me, as a matter of fact. I couldn't be here much with him. Not often. And it would be no easy thing, that you can decide offhand, this way, without talking it over with Bob. He'd have to have some time to decide."

"Bob would decide the moment he heard of the proposal. You know that, Jim."

"Of course Bronson would be made to understand that he could stay here as long as he behaved himself. But, of course, Emily, you know there isn't much hope, I haven't any hope—that I can manage to—change the legal status of the case. I've promised to see what can be done, partly to satisfy him that I want him with us. If in the beginning I had divorced his mother, instead of letting her divorce me—"

This was what some way hurt Emily. Jim could now talk of his divorce with her. He had some way fortified himself

against her. He talked like a brother to her—not like a forbidden lover. Well, that was what she had wanted, wasn't it? She couldn't acknowledge to herself that she had wanted more from him, could she?

And as for Bronson, it was absurd to suppose that she could be hurt because he had transferred his attention from her to his father. That was what she had been working for all the summer. And she had known the first time they all sat together at the table, after their return, that she, or some one, or something, had accomplished that. She had realized that from the way their understanding eyes had sought each other's that first night, as they sat at supper. Moreover, Bronson had leaned across the table. "Drink your milk, dad!" he had commanded. She and Bob had realized together, when they heard his voice, and with a glance confessed to each other, that there was something new between father and son. They were like lovers, almost. And she had been so glad she could scarcely keep her tears back. Bronson had been charming—perfectly delightful, sitting there talking with Bob about the fishing place. She could see Jim deliberately letting the boy do all the talking. Jim was tired, of course, after his journey, but he sat at the table a new man, and a happy man, who chuckled and laughed, glancing significantly at her and Bob.

The whole three of them were prizing together the few hours that remained to them of the boy's comradeship. There was a most tender tone to the house. At least, that was Emily's way of describing the attitude even of the three men to one another. The boy seemed to set their spirits soaring by his blunt, absurd, boyish loveliness. There was, for instance, the characteristic sure way in which he had chosen to be called by his father's name instead of his mother's name, Bronson.

As he had come into the dining room, the morning after his return, Emily had greeted him with, "Good morning, Bronson," and as he took his place beside her he had replied, grinning:

"My name's *Jim*. Cut out that Bronson stuff."

She hadn't taken him seriously.

"James Bronson Kenworthy is a—good name," she remarked, carelessly.

"Maybe it is. But it's not *mine*. Mine's Jim Kenworthy. That's my father's name, and it's mine."

"I always called you 'Young Jim,'" Bob began. "I liked—"

"I'm not so young, either!"

"I'll call you 'Big Jim.'" Bob was trying to fuss him.

"Does your father know you've changed, Bron—Big Jim?" Emily asked.

"No. Not yet. But he will when I tell him. You got to cut out this Bronson business. I won't stand for it!"

"Oh, you must give us time," Emily protested. "We can't get out of so old a habit all in a minute. It'll be a little bit confusing. There's one Jim here already, you know."

"There's two," replied Bronson.

Emily had the pleasure of telling Jim about the new name when he came down early, because it was Sunday.

"I must tell you, Jim, what happened at breakfast. Bronson must have thought it out in the night. When I called him Bronson, he said to me, first thing, that he'd changed his name. He wants us to call him Jim. He says that's his father's name and it's his name. He has dropped the Bronson."

"Oh, he *has!*" said Jim. Emily saw he was trying not to look pleased by the news.

"Isn't he a *dear,* Jim?" she exclaimed. "I'm going to miss him so!" She spoke impulsively, and regretted instantly having

mentioned the hateful fact before him. "I'm going to church, Jim. Old Mr. White has come to preach, and there won't be twenty people there to listen to him. Mrs. Johnston came here yesterday to beg me to go. Otherwise I wouldn't—his last Sunday with us. I must go and dress."

The men were sitting on the veranda smoking when Emily came down, ready to go. Bronson was looking very smart in his good light-gray suit. Emily had seen that all his garments were pressed and cleaned. She wasn't going to have him go back with them less carefully cared for than when he came. There was quite a brilliant cleanliness about his blond young head when he was removed by a sufficient distance from a garage. He was intent upon the sporting page of the paper when she came out into the porch. He jumped up when he heard her, and looked at her.

"Gee!" he murmured, devoutly. He stood stock-still and stared at her, speechless with approval, with admiration. "Gee!" he sighed again when he recovered.

Emily felt herself blushing with confusion. Such frank and pure admiration as the boy gave her, a woman seldom gets.

"That's the idea, kid!" Bob commented, grinning. Emily was fastening her gloves. If one went to church at all, one went properly, no matter how warm the day might be. She had on a simple white crêpe de Chine dress, with rose-colored bands on it, and a wide hat. It was the hat, she knew, that left Bronson speechless. She had gone bareheaded, most of the summer, with a parasol, or worn, at most, a snug-fitting little hat suitable for driving. And a wide softly drooping thing with a great bow of exquisitely blended dull rose-colored ribbon framed her face very satisfactorily. She knew that.

"Gee, that's a nifty lid, auntie!"

"Do you like it?"

"You bet I do!"

"I suppose you would," said Emily, thoughtfully. "Men always like pink things—red things." She couldn't resist saying things of that sort to the child. He gloated so over being put in the category of the adult.

"Ye-ah," he murmured, "they're sort of red, those—things on it."

"You don't want to go to church with me, I suppose?" She could almost tempt him to go to church.

"No," he said, "I guess not. I've been." And he laughed.

"What you laughing at?"

"What they said in church. What was it? Oh yes, I got it. It said they cut off somebody's head till the going down of the sun!" The boy snickered.

"Oh *no,* Jim! It *couldn't* have said that!"

"It was something like that, anyway, and a lot of swine! Gee! they used to have hogs, then, too! That's funny. I know all about that time. Bill and me used to quiz each other about the history stuff, and one day Bill says to me suddenly, 'Was Julius Cæsar a Roman Catholic or a Greek Catholic?' he says, right off the bat, like that. And he caught me. I says, 'He was a Roman Catholic, of course.' You bet I never heard the end of *that!* He always knew about Julius Cæsar, you can bet, because he says to Johnnie, 'What's this stuff about Jesus being a god? How could Cæsar and all them guys live before God was born? What'd they do then?' he says. And he says, 'Look what a lot you understand when some one teaches you history! You got to go on and learn, and not be a nut like me,' he says to me, a lot of times. 'And there was Socrates. Never knew nothing till now about Socrates!' he said. And

that made him sore! He was a good guy, wasn't he, dad? He wasn't scared to drink that hemlock! The old fatheads, treating him that way when he hadn't done anything!"

Amid such historical digressions Emily left them. Big Jim settled down to a magazine and the senior Jim settled down to undisturbed contemplation of him.

All the rest of the day—that last Sunday—was delightful. There were carfuls of callers that afternoon, and Jim had the satisfaction of seeing Bronson unself-consciously sitting a man with men, stared at, listened to, questioned. He spoke to them, Jim said to himself, as one having authority. And the expression of their faces was strength to Jim.

Emily said to him that evening, hesitatingly:

"Jim—I wonder—would you mind—if I should write a letter to that school, just—explaining—Bronson to the principal a little? It's so important he gets started right. And I was thinking—if the day happened to go wrong with him—he mightn't—put his best foot forward when he first arrives. I could make it—a nice letter—I mean, apologetic. I wouldn't want to seem to—give them advice—or anything like that. I wouldn't write anything—derogatory, of course!"

"Trust you for *that,* Emily! I don't know who'd give the boy a good character, if *you* wouldn't. It's like you to think of it. You'd better get it there before he goes."

"Well, I've got it written, to tell the truth. Shall I get it for you? You might see if you like it."

"You fraud! You wrote it this morning, did you? Well, of course it suits me! I'm not going to look at it. I'm sure it's—just right."

"You know, I just said—the boy had come to our care—rather suddenly—without any explanation of him—and at first

he was—very hard to understand. And I said that he had repaid our patience—more than we imagined it possible. I just told them that when he was bad he was very, very bad, but when he was good he was the dearest boy anyone could want. You know, Jim, I thought maybe if all the teachers are men—Bronson might—not just *take* to them at first. I said he had a thick shell, but he was a most rewarding nut to crack. And I hoped they would forgive me for intruding, but I was so full of hope for him, I expected such fine things of him."

That last Sunday with its little poignancies was too much for Jim. And something he had eaten, he couldn't imagine what, sickened him. He had a sleepless, nauseated night of it. He saw the stars fade, and the daylight of Monday come. He heard old Kate go down to begin the day's work. He heard the family beginning to stir, shutting doors quietly, creeping down the hall, as the custom of them all was, so that if by chance he should be asleep, they might not waken him. He heard Bronson going down the stairs. And as he sat there on the edge of his bed, too exhausted to move, too weary to lie down to a futile attempt to sleep, trying to cajole himself by the thought of the boy's departure into some appearance of energy, suddenly he heard his son running up the stairs, two steps at a time. The lad burst tremendously into his room and thrust the headlines of the morning paper before him.

"Look at there, dad! Look at *there!*"

With the paper pushed at arm's length toward his father, he stood before him blazing, just blazing, with excitement. A liner had been sunk. Under the passionately hating hope that shone from young Jim's face, his father felt himself beginning to tremble.

"Maybe *she* was on it! Maybe she's *sunk!*" he exulted, savagely, glorying brutally in the hope of her death.

The room darkened about Jim, and as he fell back limply he was partly conscious of the cry of terror that Bronson sent through the house.

"Uncle Bob! Auntie! My father's dead! My father—"

The next thing Jim knew, he realized they were all standing around his bed, and that white face, twitching, those staring eyes, were his own son's. He heard Emily earnestly reassuring some one,

"He's all right! He's coming to! He isn't *dead,* Bronson! My dear *child, he's* all right! You must keep still!"

And Bronson's babbling, protesting in a panic: "No! No! I didn't mean to! I won't do it again! Father! Father!"

Jim said wearily, "What's the matter?"

"You fainted, Jim." Bob was bending over him.

Jim half rose, indignantly. "Fainted! I did not!"

"You certainly did, old boy!" Bob assured him, solemnly.

Emily was giving a little nervous laugh of relief. "We *saw* you!" she retorted. "Look, Bronson! He's all right. Be still! Jim, you scared the wits out of the boy!"

"Oh—yes—I remember how it was." Jim was alert now. "I believe I *did* faint! I felt it coming on. It was that paper. That awful news!"

"Dad, I didn't *mean* to! I won't ever do it again! I didn't *mean* to, father!"

All his mind rallied for the boy's relief, his defense. *"I* didn't mean to, either, Bronson. I didn't mean to frighten you. I had no intention of fainting. But the horror—the war—just seemed to—to stop my heart beating. I realized it some way—

all of a sudden. And I didn't get much sleep. That was it. I hadn't had any sleep, Bronson."

"He's all right, now, Jim! Don't you talk. You never had seen anyone faint, had you, dear? It *does* give you a shock!" Emily's own eyes looked rather hollow. The unwonted tenderness of her face made it lovely. "Now you all go down to breakfast," she coaxed. "You just want to lie still, don't you, Jim? Or would you like your milk, now, since you're so wide awake? Come along, Young Jim!"

"I'm not going! I'm going to stay here!"

"My dear, your father needs some sleep! Do you suppose he can sleep, with you sitting there looking like a ghost? Come along with me. Come along, Bronson. You're enough to upset a giant, looking like that. And you can bring up his milk, and then come down for your breakfast. You said you didn't mean—to upset him. Well, come on downstairs with me, then!"

Emily dragged him away. She set him down at his place at the breakfast table, soothing him with one reassurance after another, and poured him some coffee. He was still pale.

"But look at here!" he babbled. "What's the matter with my father? What'd he faint for? I just showed him the headlines! I didn't mean to make him sick! What's he so sick for?"

"People *do* faint, Bronson! It's not—an uncommon thing. My aunt used to faint from acute indigestion. Your father was upset by something he had eaten. It's not such a frightful thing, to faint."

"It's the heart," remarked Bob, as if he had explained everything.

"But look at here! *You* don't faint, Uncle Bob! *I* don't

faint! What's he fainting for? He looks so funny sometimes. I thought he was—"

"Oh, *my dear!* I'm sorry you got such a fright! Now, here's the milk. You just take it up, and look at him. Just say something pleasant and see how all right he is. Then you come right straight down. You mustn't stay, Bronson. Bring down the paper, too. You'll feel better if you see him again."

"I never meant to hurt him. I didn't mean to do anything." He departed protesting.

And Emily sat, murmuring:

"It's just a shame! It's been a shock to him! Did you ever see a child more terrified, Bob?"

"Huh!" replied Bob, making light of the boy's feelings. "How's Jim going to get away on Wednesday, feeling that way? He did look bad. It's time the boy was beginning to get scared about him."

"He can't do anything, being scared. He'd only be unhappy, Bob. After all, he's only a boy. He oughtn't to be worried by—about his father."

But later in the day, when Emily at last got a chance to speak to Jim, she had changed her mind somewhat. She had to wait carefully for her chance, for Bronson wouldn't go to the garage that morning. He couldn't eat any breakfast, either, and when Bob went downtown he took a magazine and sat down on the stairs, where he could hear any noise that his father might make stirring around in his room. The bath water was turned noisily on, presently, and at that signal he had gone to his father's room and remained through the process of dressing, sitting alertly on the edge of the bed, ready to spring up at the first sign on his father's part—of another dying. Jim had been more depressed by the fainting episode than by anything since the first

shock of his son's arrival. It seemed to him to mark a stage of descent into weakness. Of course, he told himself, the boy had been simply appalling. To look at him had been to see murder committed. And he had been exhausted by the sleepless night. But to faint! And it was only the realization that the boy was sitting there miserably expecting him to do something else terrible, that bucked him up. He had to be gay, he had to jest, to get that look out of his boy's face. And he jested so successfully, and they two came down to lunch so happily together, that the way Bronson kept his eyes on Jim made Emily sing to herself. All the afternoon the boy had clung to his father, and it was only when his unsatisfied desire to help prompted him to ask his father to go with him for a little slow ride, that he left his side long enough for Emily to talk privately to Jim. When he started downtown for the car, she began,

"I suppose it was hard on *you,* Jim, but really, I believe that it was the best thing that has happened to Bronson all summer. He *has* gone softly to-day! Maybe it's unfair of me to want so young a boy to be serious, but really there was a sort of—a natural quietness that was lacking in him before. He's been so —humble to-day, and so eager to help and to understand. I had a long talk with him. He wanted to know what I thought about your health. And I told him frankly you looked better to me since you came home from Michigan than you had for a year or two, maybe. I thought it was a fine chance, and I just told him that if he behaved, and gave you no further—anxiety about him, you would get better every day. I think he understands that, some way. It just sends him off—with such determination to please you, some way. He wants you to be well enough to fight for him, as he says. He thinks a lot about—that

case, seems to me. This shock has been the discipline—we have felt all summer he ought to have. It's opened his mind—to new thoughts."

"I told him not to hope too much, Emily. I—I said I hadn't much hope of getting—things—getting a new decision. It seems hopeless—almost. But I have to *try* to do *something,* now that he feels this way."

Then after a moment the boy himself was there with them, looking as carefully at his father as a young mother looks at a suffering child.

"You feel better now, dad? You don't feel too tired to go? I'd just as soon not go, if you don't feel good."

And Jim patiently assured him, for the twentieth time that day, of his complete recovery.

The last few hours passed as tolerably as such hours can. Emily had a horror of departures, of farewells long drawn out.

"We're not going to sit around with nothing to do for an hour before the train time," she had vowed to herself. "Jim's not going to have to do that!"

And so the packing was left till the last morning. She had begged Jim to try to sleep all the forenoon, but it was useless to try, he explained, coming into Bronson's bedroom. Bronson fairly sprang to lift a pile of clean collars from the comfortable chair in which he wanted to install his father. And for two hours before lunch the three of them sat there, in the bedroom, chattering together. Bronson was extremely high-spirited. He was determined to pack his things to suit himself, and he seemed unusually hard to please. He arranged things, and rearranged things, childishly, as if packing was a new game. He was full of his own strange sort of jokes, and whims, and absurdities, and more than once Jim found himself laughing

heartily. Emily was doing that. Emily was egging the child on into nonsenses. Purposefully, of course. She didn't intend to have the day tragic, he understood. If it had in itself such possibilities, it slid easily into the ridiculous. Bronson was determined to take his clean garage overalls in his handbag. He valued them far more highly than mere traveling suits. Emily suggested he might leave them right in his bureau drawer for next summer, biting her lip to hide her amusement when she beheld the laundry-faded, stained, discolored things crammed forcefully on top of pajamas and brushes. "At least you won't need them on the train, you know," she argued. But he replied, earnestly, he would have them all ready to get into when he got to the school. And she said no more. After all, his mother wasn't going to see those plebeian garments. Indeed, his mother wasn't going to see his trunks at all. For, though her lawyers had directed the boy's clothing to be sent to the New York house, the boy refused to consider that arrangement. And Jim had thought, wearily, "Oh, what's the use of fighting about a trunkful of underclothes? She'll never know whether it's at the house or at the school."

Jim was the more anxious to be altogether conciliatory, because he feared the boy might presently balk at the whole plan of the school-going because his mother was paying his expenses there. Bronson seemed not to have realized that there was any money involved in his plans. He never considered that his school outfit, which his mother had had prepared and sent there, awaiting him, had cost anything. And Jim wondered uncomfortably whether or not he ought to explain this fact and get the shock of the realization over while the lad was with him. It would be no use offering to pay, himself, for the schooling, because Mrs. Veile would never allow that, and,

besides, from the prospectus which had come, Jim judged it to be an extremely expensive place to learn—so few boys, such elaborate shops for their delight, so many highly qualified masters. He would let the boy take his trunk where he wanted to, and pack his overalls in his handbag, and go away without realizing his dependence on his mother—anything to get him into the school while yet the chaste mood of peace was upon him.

The trunks were away before lunch. Bronson himself drove Bob's truck to the station, with a man from the garage to help lift them out. He came back with the train ticket, his Pullman ticket, the checks carefully stowed away in his pocket, and a roll of bills, for his expenses. Jim had given him the money and he didn't explain that the court had stipulated that Mrs. Veile should pay the child's expenses to and from his father.

Emily had ordered the dinner solely for the boy's pleasure, and most successfully. They had a sponge cake for dessert, with one layer of ice cream in the middle of it, and another in place of icing over it, and she gave young Jim a double portion, and chuckled to see him quite drown the cake in thick chocolate sauce. It was so much to his taste that she offered him another plateful, and he accepted.

"You know, this is a sort of George Washington pie," she couldn't help remarking to the men, remembering the first regrettable occasion on which she had offered that food to Bronson. She thought: "Oh, what a difference! And I've learned something, too! Of course, a boy doesn't want a lot of cornstarch when he might have ice cream!"

"Gee!" commented Bronson, scraping up the last taste of the chocolate from his plate, "that's what it is to be famous! Poor old bird!" (He was referring to the father of his coun-

try.) "He never *saw* ice cream. I don't suppose he did. Do you know what I'd like named for me, dad? I'll tell you." He shut his eyes and smacked his lips. "A great, big, fat, juicy porterhouse! And a lot of brown gravy, with little chunks of fat in it, and a whole plate of French fried potatoes! Like we had to-day. If I was some great man, and it was named for me, you wouldn't have to say, 'Porterhouse and French frieds.' You could just yell at the waiter this way"—he waved his arm imperiously—"and say, 'A Jim Kenworthy, P. D. Q.,' and you'd get it! That's what I'm going to have named for me! Or, no. You could say, 'A Jim Kenworthy, and a George Washington cold,' like that! With ice cream, that would be! That's what I'll have on the diner of my airplanes from New York to Yokohama and Calcutta. And if they don't like that, they can catch an Eskimo, when we're flying low! They needn't be so finicky when they fly with me! I'll tell 'm *that right now!* There's not so very much left, is there, auntie?"

"You want to lick the platter?" she asked, pushing it toward him, and he sat scraping up and marvelously stowing away the chocolate sauce, a noble child, full of wit and high and airy purpose, the joy of his doting world.

Bob seemed reluctant to leave for his work, and quite as reluctant to let anyone suppose he was staying for any sentimental reason. It was remarks like his, "Well, it's two now," or, "Don't go to that lunch counter in the Northwestern; go to the dining room," that brought Jim's thought back to the fact, again and again, that now only a few minutes and the boy would be gone. Emily had prepared against the tensity of the afternoon rather poorly, she feared. She had beguiled the librarian into letting her take home the reference catalogue of Boston Tech., of Michigan and Illinois and Wisconsin universities.

She hadn't expected they would prove really exciting entertainment. But Bronson fell upon them quite characteristically with cries of horror.

"Gee! All that stuff! Chemistry! What's that? Geometry! Physiology! Gee! I don't know any physics! I don't take examinations! I couldn't ever do all that! Good Lord!"

And Bob and Jim were there to strengthen his heart. Boys weren't expected to be able to pass all the exams in a few days' work. Boys worked away patiently month after month, to get ready for college. It took all day. They didn't sit round and learn history in a garage at night. They got up and went at it early in the morning. He could learn how to write exams. That was what his school was for—to help him, to prepare him. Didn't stupid boys by the dozens get in year by year, by hard work? they asked.

"Why, I passed those exams once *myself!*" cried Bob, as if he had proved his point beyond dispute by that statement.

And then there was that very interesting question,

"If *you* get me, dad, and I live here, maybe I'll go to Illinois! Maybe I won't go to Boston! Is Boston any better than Illinois? Why?"

And Bob uttered his judgments wisely, while Jim wondered. Of course, there was no chance that he would "get" him. But if he should, there would be limitations. There would be comparative costs to consider. Might it even be that by choosing to live with his father Bronson would cut himself off, blindly, ignorantly, from hopes of that great wealth? Could he be allowed to choose what might make him a poor man—a man like his father, too poor to "get" his son? Poverty naturally seemed a very bitter thing to Jim Kenworthy that summer, with that boy around. How could he begin a case which might

result in disinheriting the child? To go through life never having to consider costs—that would be something, even if the lad should thereby lose the sense of common values. And Bob and young Jim sat comparing entrance requirements as Jim silently pondered. And in case he never got his health back—in case he never was able to earn much again—what education, what start could he give the boy? There would be Bob and Emily, of course, eager to share their last crust with his son. But money! Oh, for money!

And from infantile questions to adult comprehension the lad chattered on, after three, after half past three, till it was time, as Emily had to remind them, to go to the station.

The whole garage staff, eight men of them, was there to shake hands with their fellow mechanic, most of them in greasy khaki overalls, bareheaded, grimy handed, grinning broadly. Emily hoped the whole station was observing with what heartiness, with what comradeship the heir to the Bronson millions was shaking their hands. All the women in town couldn't spread scandal enough to drown the chorus of amused admiration which that group of men raised about the boy. They shook hands, and stood a little way off, to watch the departure without interfering with more intimate farewells.

The train was coming. It was in sight, way down the track. Emily had to say good-by. She had deliberately worn her "nifty lid." And holding his hand, she reached up and kissed her nephew. And as she withdrew, while he was reaching out his hand to his father, he murmured, red with joy, and his little dimples playing round his soft mouth:

"I *thought* maybe you would kiss me when I went!"

Jim heard that, and Emily, and stood looking. The train

was in. The moment was so precious. The boy looked so lovable, so fine.

"Oh, you *did!*" Emily heard herself cry softly to him. "Well, *next* summer I shall kiss you every day! Every morning before breakfast. Good-by, dear! Good-by, Big Jim!"

And she had to turn away. Jim and Big Jim stood shaking hands—just looking at each other. She couldn't bear to look at Jim's face. But she wanted to remember always that face of the lad, that beautiful, reassuring face of the lad, looking with passionate directness into his father's eyes.

And he was jumping up the steps—he was waving. She felt tears flooding her eyes. The garage men were watching for a last sight of him. The garage men, bless them! fond of the lad, grimy, bareheaded. She hoped the whole station was observing that send-off. Jim had got out of the crowd. Jim had made for the car. How was she to join him? What was she to say to Jim now?

Chapter Twenty Two

In New York Jim was living in the apartment of one of the members of the law firm with which he had been connected. He had gone down to the office to see his former cronies, and Blackwell had been out. But when he got back to his hotel he had heard the familiar voice over the phone. The voice was familiar, but with something strange in it. "Is this you, Kenworthy? I heard you were back. For the love of *God,* come and stay with me. I'm alone, Kenworthy. Bring your things over before dinner. Won't you?" Jim had heard, without so much realizing it, of the breaking up of Blackwell's pleasant life. He had been a widower for many years, living in the country, devoting himself to his daughter, living around her and through her and for her. And the daughter recently, at sixteen, had been drowned canoeing. He had sold the country place and come to town again. And as Jim sat smoking with him evening after evening, long after he should have been in bed, he felt himself useful, a most pleasant sensation. For Blackwell had a horror of loneliness. And Blackwell had of necessity known the more obvious details of Jim's divorce. He knew, too, that the boy had been with him for the summer.

So as they sat smoking one night, Jim laid before him Bronson's demand. The boy asked only to be allowed to stay with his father. He asked it with such earnestness that his father had promised to see what could be done. Was there anything that could be done, he asked of Blackwell. And Blackwell, spreading apart his fingers and balancing their tips

together, stretched out his legs, and sighed, and fell to thinking. And having thought a long time, he sighed again and said:

"I don't know, Kenworthy. It's hard lines." And he thought a long time more, and sighed, but all he could say was, "Surely, it doesn't seem right."

And then they went over it all again, Blackwell knowing rather less about the truth of the matter than Bob or Emily did. But Jim cursed aloud his folly in the beginning. If he had demanded the custody of the boy on the right grounds, in the first place—

"Well, you did what seemed right to you at the time, Kenworthy. No one can do more than that." Blackwell reminded him. "You could never have foreseen."

Bronson's letters, meanwhile, were laconically gratifying. "This school is all right," he vouchsafed, and Jim knew that was the climax of the boy's praise. Bill, he remembered, had been described as "all right." And with that uttermost phrase Bronson had described his father when he wrote to Bill. "This place is all right. Come out and see me." That was the essence of most of the letters at first. The second week he was more wordy. "This place is all right. I am working hard. Come out and see me." Later he wrote proudly: "I haven't got in bad yet with them. You said you would come out and see me."

Upon getting that, Jim wrote to the head of the school, asking at what hour he could most conveniently see his son. The answer was immediate, courteous, and short. The head regretted that he had no authority to permit Mr. Kenworthy to visit his son. Jim swallowed his anger and wrote to Bronson that he couldn't come out just now, but he would try to come later. "Surely," he thought, "if the man understood the

case, if I could explain how things are—" And he deliberated. He was afraid to say frankly to the boy that his mother had arranged to prevent their meeting. That would make the school seem like a trap set by that divorced woman. It would make his hatred more furious against her, if such a thing were possible, than it already was. So Jim waited thoughtfully.

One morning the sympathetic Blackwell called up from his office.

"Look here, Kenworthy, I've learned something interesting. I happened to be talking to Burke. You know Burke, of Whitman, Burke, and Steinlar? Oh, you *must* know him! We got to talking about the financial—er, about the power of money in these cases, you know. Of course I didn't mention names, at all, and he asked me if I knew about Swanker. One of the Swankers, you know. He is doing some most interesting—survey, you might say, of the power of money to wreck justice in these things—divorce cases. At least I gather that's what it is. Burke wouldn't be entirely definite. But it's a mighty interesting story. And there may be something in it for you. It seems he's had some of the greatest cases—anonymously, you might say. There's a sort of foundation, I gather it is trying to equalize chances of justice. Burke insisted on making a date for you with Swanker, without even knowing your name. I said I wasn't authorized to take the first step even for you. He declares this Swanker devotes his whole practice, without any publicity, to just cases of your sort. Could you possibly go to see him this afternoon? How are you feeling this morning? I must say I'd like you to go just to see what happens, what this all amounts to, if you feel able. Let's get a line on this. It may be exactly the thing, for all we know. It can't hurt possibly to look into it, can it? And I don't see any

reason for hesitating to investigate it. The Swanker family, you know—!"

Jim went at three. He went to please Blackwell, and with misgivings, realizing poignantly his poverty. He came away at seven-thirty, torn, exalted, and terrified. He felt like a poor worm of a sinner with whom the angel of the Lord has been wrestling for hours. He fell into a taxi and got home and shut himself up in his little bedroom, hoping that Blackwell might be delayed, that he might not come soon. Jim wanted to analyze his extraordinary experience, to realize what had been happening to him.

He had a sense of a richly furnished long library, and a man sitting at a desk before him, a man with black eyes, deep and challenging, with much dark red color in his tanned face, and a nose somewhat Jewish, very closely cut dark curly hair; a grim, strong sensitive face it was, with command in it, a man who might have commanded a ship—a ship of pirates—by prayers and fastings.

And he recalled sharply and with sinking of heart that it was to this man, this piratical and evangelical stranger, that he had told word for word—it must have been in spite of himself—phrase for phrase, all the boy's doubts, all his agony, the whole relationship between him and his mother, all that he had kept even from Bob and Emily. And he had seen that man sitting there throwing phrase after phrase gloatingly into the deep dungeon of his trustworthiness. Certainly that man would never reveal what had been told him with professional privacy, Jim knew that. But the realization that he had confided in the man sickened him.

For that man had absolutely gloated over the story. He had exulted in it till his eyes shone. And that was because he knew

all about Mrs. Veile. He had a file full of information about her, and even some about Veile. He drew it from the cabinets in which he kept information about all leaders in women's suffrage, all women prominent in "women's work." That man had opened his hand and got it around the helpless heart of the situation, and he would squeeze it, squeeze it. Jim could feel his fingers tightening about it.

And then when he had learned all there was to know, he had turned on Jim, and not passionately, but with pity and patience, he had pointed out to him the error of his way. Like a prophet of God, intent on saving a brand from the burning, he had labored with him. Did Jim not see the error of his way? Did he not realize how foolish it had been to screen a woman? Why should a man try to screen a woman? Were not the women of the nation vile because they could depend upon a lot of silly men to screen them? Did Jim not see the destruction that lay before men unless they rallied and together threw off the yoke of the weak sex, the sex that in its weakness was destroying the nation? Could Jim not forget his personal feelings? Could he not rise to a sense of oneness with all the men who suffered as he did? Were men to live, in this country? Were they to have any rights left? Not unless they rallied. Not unless they fought for them together. This organized weak sex, day by day, state by state, was taking the very right to manhood from them. Had Jim noticed what the women of Indiana had done last week? No, and he probably didn't know what they were planning to do in Maine in the next season. And so the man sat there, exhorting him, praying toward him, his face lit up with a holy faith. And then quietly he told him his own story.

Had his fathers not come to this country to find liberty? Had

they not toiled and with luck and nerve and perseverance made their great fortunes? Didn't the whole nation know the history of the Swankers' wealth? And here he sat, Nicholas Swanker, paying a woman, a woman perfectly and openly rotten, the scandal of whatever continent she lived on, an alimony of fifty thousand dollars of the American money his fathers had made, because the laws of the land were made for women. He had fought the decision through every court of appeal, futilely, because all courts favored women, all judges and all juries. Was there a place in the world, except America, where women murdered men without fear of punishment? He had defied the courts. He had refused to pay. He had stayed in prison for three years, and he had decided to come out of it and pay the alimony only because he feared he would die there, and if he died, that woman would get all the money he left, in spite of all he could do. So now he had paid her fifty thousand dollars a year for nineteen years, and the rest of his fortune he managed to spend to the last cent month by month, saving only what would pay the cost of his funeral, so that she might not gain by his death.

And he had spent it, cent by cent, for the freedom of men. Did Jim imagine he was alone in being triumphed over by a woman? There was a fellowship of men, a holy, silent, powerful crusade of men ready to help him. Let the newspapers joke about alimony clubs! Members of them were not trying to get their pictures in the papers. They had had enough of that during their divorce cases. They laid low, and worked together for one another. Had Jim ever considered the Manaker divorce case? Had he considered the decision in the Balls' case? He would do well to. This fellowship would take up Bronsons' case. Why should the old evil chivalry to women spoil another

boy's life? It was a case after Mr. Swanker's own heart. Mrs. Veile, with her sanctimonious suffrage work, her damned desire for publicity—if Jim said the word, this case should be put through with more money to back it than Mrs. Veile could ever manage to have at her disposal. It would be fought to the finish, and not only for the lad's safe, but for the sake of oppressed men everywhere, to discredit woman's suffrage, to show the world what sort of women were at the head of that army. Mr. Swanker wiped the sweat from his ascetic face.

Jim shrank away from this intimacy with that face—a revolting, unforeseen, irresistible intimacy. The man was a fanatic; quite unbalanced. He was mad. Not a person Jim Kenworthy could possibly trust his affairs to. The whole thing was absurd—an ignoble campaign of hate. It was out of the question that a man with a background like Jim Kenworthy's should become involved in such a mess. He wouldn't take a week to decide, as Swanker had urged. He would decide now, instantly, not to go near the man again. He was afraid of the infuriated power of that hypnotic personality. A man had come suddenly into the room, as Jim sat there, and laid down a pile of typed letters on Swanker's desk. And Swanker had dismissed him with a smile—what a strange, terrible healing smile. And as the door had closed behind him, Swanker had muttered slowly, his face contorted with purpose: "A white slave, one of my white slaves. All the clerks are. A man with his family sold away from him, Kenworthy, by the laws women make. We're all in the same boat, in this office. All working together—a brotherhood of fallen men, like you and me, rescuing one another." And Jim had shivered. Oh, a terrible person, this Swanker, who never let a man go unconverted, unwon to himself. One to flee from as from a burning

city. "Why did I listen to him?" Jim groaned. "He's mad!" That was sure, and it was as sure as that those cords of fascination would never let one escape. . . .

And the man, this ardent flame of sacrifice, had begged him to think the matter well over before mentioning his visit to his friend, or to Burke. So Jim said that evening, to Blackwell:

"Yes, I saw him. An unusual man. Seems rather a crank on some subjects. He had nothing to advise, immediately, of course. He seemed willing to look into the case. I'm grateful to Burke for telling you about him, I can assure you. He did me a real favor. But I don't suppose anything definite will come out of it."

He turned the matter over in his mind day after day, without prejudice, without passion. He had never been resentful about his wife. He had been, in the beginning of their marriage, as sorry for her as for himself. He had acted instinctively in letting her divorce him for non-support. He had never questioned then the wisdom of his course, never imagining his unselfishness in so doing would drive her to such extremes of anger against him. He had never imagined her furious determination to keep him away from the boy. It was strange, when he came to think of it, that, although he had been for years considering the advisability of divorce, of a mutual agreement to separate, that she apparently had never imagined what was in his mind, never apparently thought of divorce until it seemed to be able to better her social position. And now it seemed, rather it was clearly proved, when he considered what a ruin it had made of his son, that his chivalry had been a foolish thing, exactly as Swanker had pointed out. It had been a destructive thing. Because, as Swanker had also pointed out, it was a lie. And lies were women's weapons, and their

victorious weapons. That much he granted Swanker, thinking it all over day after day.

But that men, considering themselves injured, should band together to fight against women seemed to him somewhat insane. He had never thought much about women's suffrage. He had never been convinced that granting the suffrage to them would make any difference one way or another. It seems a matter of indifference, with perhaps some arguments in its favor, sentimental arguments. He remembered that once as a half-grown lad he had been standing with a group of schoolboys on Main Street, watching the village drunkard, a filthy old idiot, trying to balance on one foot to lace his old hat around the other, supposing it was a new shoe. And as they had stood there in this rather ignominious amusement, a school-teacher had come silently up behind them and, laying a hand on Jim, and one on the boy next to him, she had said: "Boys, remember this! That man is considered wise enough to vote for law-makers, but your mothers aren't." And with that she had gone scornfully on, leaving Jim, at least, red with confusion. That was about the only reason he had ever had for his complacent tolerance of women's demands. If they could get political rights, let them have them, he had thought indifferently when he was unhappy in his marriage. And when it was becoming unusually irksome he had said to himself: "Give them the vote, by all means! Anything to get them out of the house!" And now Swanker, full of heavenly wrath, had got hold of him.

But he was breaking away from Swanker slowly, as one forgets a pain when it has gone. October passed, an unusually wet and dismal month. He was lonely. He was discouraged about his physical condition. It was on one of the rainiest, darkest of the chilling days that he sat at a restaurant table, idly,

having forced down his throat his insipid diet. He had in his pocket a letter from Bronson, which was a peremptory command to come to visit him at once. And as he sat musing, the sun for a moment came out brilliantly across the table where he was sitting.

"I'm going to go out this afternoon, right now!" Jim said to himself. "I'll go and have a talk with the head, and maybe I'll get to see him! Anyway, I'll have tried."

He got back to Blackwell's apartment that evening feeling that Swanker was right. He had almost joined the brotherhood of hating men. He described what had happened so bitterly that Blackwell looked at him thoughtfully.

"The whole estate, the whole park, was hedged in with a high fence, and a guard at the gate, a lodgekeeper, I suppose. He stopped me when I tried to go in. He turned me out. Said the head wasn't there. He said—I stood there a little while, wondering what to do, thinking maybe I'd see the boy some place about, and he practically ordered me off the place, as if I'd been a vagabond!"

"Fenced in, isn't it? I remember now—who was it was telling me?—somebody. Oh yes! Robinson. He was saying that that school—he called it a reform school for the incorrigible sons of the rich. He says they take any boy the other schools won't have, and they make men out of them. He said it was wonderful what they do with them; with these new stunts—psycho-analysis and all that. They know what they're about, Kenworthy."

"They needn't treat me as if I was a thief, need they? I'm going to see Swanker to-morrow." And as he sat smoking, the hatefulness of Blackwell's phrase grew upon him. The incorrigible sons of the rich, indeed! What was his child doing

among a lot of boys that had been dismissed from other schools? Was his boy incorrigible, whom Emily had tamed in an hour with a little kindness? He sat gritting his teeth. Undoubtedly Swanker was a wise man, and to Swanker he would go.

But in the morning his judgment still warned him against such a course. There was a gleam in Swanker's eye which made him hesitate.

He didn't go to Swanker that day. He was too tired, for one thing. And he got from Bronson a short command to come and visit him the next Sunday. It was a sobering letter, and Jim devoted half his idle day to considering it. He would have to tell Bronson that he was not allowed to visit the school. And he would have to tell him in such a way that Bronson would not, upon learning the fact, fly into a rage and leave the school.

He wrote him very carefully. He hoped Bronson understood that in affairs of this sort, in legal matters, there was no room for rashness. If there was to be any hope that he would be allowed to choose his home, he would have to walk circumspectly. In trials, sometimes, the very tone of the lawyer's voice turned the scale in his client's favor or against him. Jim had learned that Mrs. Veile had given instructions that he was not to visit Bronson in school, and it was the part of wisdom for them to seem not to be annoyed at all by this restriction. Bronson was to be careful, as if his life depended upon it, not to show the least displeasure at this announcement. He would have to wait, and go on doing his best in his lessons. Any other course on his part might queer the whole affair. They must wait patiently, and Jim would see if he might not, in some way, get permission to visit him. If Bronson was not willing to obey him absolutely in this matter, Jim could scarcely see what use there would be of trying to take up the case again. After

all, it was only seven weeks since they had seen each other, and they could write as often as they pleased.

The letter hadn't been gone two hours when Swanker called him by phone.

"Can you lunch with me on Saturday, Kenworthy? I'm having a guest you'd like to meet. The boy is going to be with me. Your boy, I mean, Bronson. I thought I'd get a rise out of you! That's all right! He'll be here about one. Come over a little early, yourself. I want to talk with you. Oh, its nothing! I'll tell you all about it. I often have such little affairs. I really entertain a good deal."

Jim accepted without a minute's hesitation. There was no law in the heaven or the earth that forbade him having lunch with his own child, was there? If there was, he was ready to defy it. He couldn't help marveling over Swanker. This seemed exactly the kind of thing he would take great trouble to do for a stranger. There were undoubtedly exhaustless depths of kindness in that man. But he would accept warily the invitation to go and have a talk. He wasn't going to let Swanker put any nonsense in that boy's head! He must make sure of that. Bronson must positively be given no false hopes.

To this Swanker in his library consented heartily. It was too early to have anything definite to say to the boy. His idea was that the lad should stay in school where he was till the next summer, and then go to his father, till his mother came home from Europe to try to get him back. And "when she comes back, she'll find us ready for her!" he commented, grimly. He smiled when Jim tried to find out how he had managed to get permission for the boy to come.

"You didn't take me very seriously the other day, did you?" He was almost poking fun at Jim. "You didn't think we could

do much. I told you we had power. We have money and we have influence. I told you plainly. I put my hand on that man of ours who has known the head of the school intimately for years. I knew he could manage him. I told him enough so that he could lay the moral issues of this case before him. It took some skill, of course. The boy doesn't know you are to be here. They have had a trip—to some steel mills, I think it is—and the master in charge is instructed to leave the boy here for the afternoon. And so he will. They'll be along any time now. I'll leave you here. I'm going out for lunch. But I'll be in before I go to see him. I've ordered lunch for you together here."

Jim, left alone, couldn't sit still. He got up and looked about him. The library was very long and narrow, all the second floor of the old house. It was a rich room, to be sure, but somewhat worn and shabby. He had seen vaguely that its color was not the usual color of shelves of books. And now he saw that one whole side, from ceiling to floor, was pamphlets and reports, reports of women's clubs, of political suffrage clubs, of professional women's clubs, of artistic clubs, of reform clubs, of temperance clubs, handbooks of women's work. He took down at random one in which his wife had had a hand. He remembered seeing the fat paper-covered thing around his home. He opened it curiously, to see if it was as dangerous a thing as Swanker made out. Page after page of the margin was filled with closely written notes, and references of refutations, with an occasional bit of ridicule, and sometimes a blasphemous oath of disgust. Jim continued his walk around the room. Even the richly bound books dealt with the menace—books of psychology in German and French, books of physiology, of history, shelves of memoirs of women of various revolutions,

histories of marriage, of infanticide, of witchcraft, of epidemics, of the church, of the papacy, of morals of democracy, of costumes, of industries, of prostitution, all arranged, all numbered, even the magazines piled upon the tables made valuable by the study some one had devoted to them. If Jim was more impressed by the power of Mr. Swanker, of the disinterested kindness of Mr. Swanker, he was also more impressed by his fanaticism. Stark mad, the man was. And yet—he turned toward the door.

There was Bronson, coming curiously into the room! Jim hurried over to him where he stood looking wonderingly around. The boy saw him, incredulously, and let out a yell.

"Dad!" he cried. "You here! Why, *dad!*"

"Didn't you know I was here?"

"No! You old son-of-a-gun! How did you get me here father? Is this where you live?"

"Scarcely! Didn't you really know I was here? What did you come for, then?"

"Blair just said I was to wait here—he said it was a library, a technical library—till he came for me!"

What further proof of docility could there be than the one the lad had unconsciously given for himself. A master had told him to sit down and wait till he came for him! Jim realized that even as he stood beaming and being beamed upon. They had so much to say, so much to ask. Whose house was this, Bronson must know.

"You fooled her, all right, didn't you, dad?" he chuckled, admiringly. "She never meant me to see you; she said you couldn't see me! We'll show her!" And at that he stopped most abruptly, as if he might have recalled the fainting scene, and took another tone. They sank down in deep chairs, side

by side, overflowing with questions and explanations. "You got me this time, all rightie! How'd you do it, dad? If you got me this time, you can get me again!"

"You understand, son, that I think your—Mrs. Veile—is acting quite contrary to the spirit of the decision in saying I was not to see you. I think in this matter she has exceeded her right."

"Exceeded her right! Huh! That's good! Exceeded her right!" He laughed wickedly.

"You understand I don't consider this anything contrary to the decision that was reached. It's not like kidnapping you."

"You fooled her all right, anyway!" Bronson chuckled with satisfaction. His father had risen in his estimation by this strategical victory. And then Swanker himself came in, came up and shook hands with the boy cordially, and explained himself discreetly.

"I don't know the head of your school, but we've mutual friends, and I heard you were to be in town to-day. So I was able to get you here. You see, it isn't quite regular, is it?" he smiled frankly at the boy. "You just better not say where you had lunch. Don't mention it to the master. You just keep still about it. I shouldn't be surprised if you are allowed to come here regularly, if you can keep your mouth shut."

"I'll say I'll keep my mouth shut!"

"I can see you will. I shall be glad to have you. I'm sorry an engagement prevents me from staying now, to get acquainted with you. You two won't miss me much, I can see."

It took them a long, long time to finish the lunch. That was partly the fault of the service and partly the fault of the eaters. They were served by a most broken-looking old man, who, Jim supposed at once, was some sort of "white slave." Few black

ones, indeed, could have looked more disconsolate. Bronson chuckled and chortled on; he began at the beginning, when he left his father at the station with Emily and Bob. He told what Bill had said that day in New York. Bill said: "Sure. If your dad fights for you, I'll do what I can for you. I'll go into court, if they want me to." Bill was "all right," but Bronson had known all the time he would be. He told of his arrival at the school.

"I just walked in, and I said, 'Here I am!' And they didn't know who I was! I said, 'My name is Kenworthy—James Kenworthy.' And they said it wasn't. They hadn't heard anything about any James Kenworthy. They said they were expecting a boy called Bronson. 'I'm him,' I said, 'and you can cut out the Bronson stuff right now!' and they laughed, dad! But they cut it out all right. They call me Kenworthy, anyway. I'm the tallest boy they ever had in the school, dad. My bed was too little for me. I could kick the end right out of it, if I wanted to, laying still—lying still, I mean. They are going to get me a new one if I don't kick it out, and use that for a little boy. They treat you white all the time, dad. But they make us work. You ought to see our shops, dad! Gee! they're swell. Better 'n garages, any time! You ought to see where we went this morning! Gee! The furnaces they have! The big pours! And the big moulds! We only have little smelts in our school. The older boys make the moulds and pour, themselves. I'm going to pour next spring! I'm going to make some wheels, like we saw to-day, and an engine to drive them. Of course I can, if I find out how! I could make a whole little car, myself, if I wanted to. They don't care what you make as long as you make it right. But they won't stand for no monkey work. Double negatives that time. Gee!

I forget! They make you talk right all the time at school!" Bronson sighed. "I'll make the body in the woodwork shop. I made Aunt Emily a bookrack with a patent screw on it. I invented that screw myself, and I don't allow any of the little kids to make one like it. It dumps all the books out of it as quick as anything! I'll show it to you when its done. I'll make you one, too, if you want it. I could make one with two screws in it, so that both sides of it could fall out when you pressed the button, if you want me to."

And so he chattered on, and over the satisfaction of the perfect intimacy there glowed and twinkled in the boy's consciousness that his father had some way outwitted his mother. That bound them more closely together in conspiracy. That looked like business. His father had undoubtedly, for the afternoon, at least, taken him away from his mother. His father had *got* him. Jim warned him not to suppose this accidental meeting—it was scarcely more than accidental—foretold any ultimate victory. Yet, in spite of that, Bronson went back to the school buoyed up with the desired certainty, more determined than ever to be a "peach." It was four when the master came for him. Jim could only marvel how the master could suppose that the boy would be waiting for him in that place so long. It was Swanker who, coming into the library, announced that it was time for Bronson to go.

The three of them were standing just at the door of the library; the master was waiting below.

"I hope you may come often, Jim Kenworthy," Swanker said, looking up at the boy.

"You bet I will!" Bronson answered. "Don't you know Mr. Stilton? Did you ask him to let me come here?"

"Well—I got you permission. Yes, I can say I got you the permission."

"Why?" asked Bronson.

"Well, I thought it would be a good thing for you to have a visit with your father. I thought you would enjoy it, perhaps."

"I'll say I enjoyed it!" And then Bronson took a step toward him and, stooping down a bit, peered eagerly into Swanker's richly colored face, scrutinizingly, as if he was investigating some perplexing machine. For a second he stood in that position, peering at him.

"Funny how you can be so kind," he commented, simply.

"Not at all," murmured Swanker, and Jim saw him relishing the lad's tribute, and after the lad had gone, Swanker remarked: "What a boy! What a boy!"

For an hour they sat smoking and talking about him. Jim was in an expansive mood. Men all were, he realized afterward, suspiciously, with that man Swanker to draw them out. But at the time he felt only the encouragement of Swanker's frank, kind curiosity about his child. Swanker had asked only innocent and courteous questions about him. And after Jim came away, he remembered that Swanker had refrained from urging him. Swanker had not pressed him to trust him with the case. He had said nothing about a definite course. He had only remarked, as Jim left, that he had reason to suppose that whenever the boys were brought to the city for their trips of investigation, Bronson would be allowed to come to him to see his father. And Jim said to himself, half ashamed of his ingratitude:

"Of course there's no hurry. But I really ought to say to him that eventually, when the time comes—"

For he was under obligation to Swanker. And more than

that, was he not under obligation to Bronson? Suppose Bronson knew of this power willing to help his father fight for him, and suppose he knew that his father refused to avail himself of this power. Would he be able, ever, to make his scruples clear to the boy—at least before such a refusal had altogether alienated him. Jim considered Mr. Swanker's proposition more and more favorably.

Chapter Twenty Three

In California that winter Jim's task was to resist despair, not to give himself up to horror. Influenza had left him all but prostrate. He had lived through the epidemic, and that was something, he told himself. Many stronger men than he had succumbed, leaving small, helpless families. His mother, he recalled, must have lived for years not much more able to help herself than he was now. She must have faced the possibility of dying and leaving two little boys unprovided for. He could remember now that for one whole winter she hadn't left that little house, trapped by the cold she couldn't get away from. He at least had had enough money to get away from the climate that seemed to be killing him.

He had had enough, but scarcely a bit more. He had lain there in that room in Blackwell's flat, the hospitals too full to take him in, no nurse to be had, cared for by that good man Blackwell, who had been as kind to him as Emily could have been. He had lain there and thought of dying, of leaving the boy he had got back again, alone, unmothered, ungovernable. The doctors had told him California wasn't likely to do him much good. There was only a chance, some of them said. And Jim had been determined to seize the chance. He couldn't get better in New York. He seemed to feel his life trickling away, until he was driven all but mad by his weakness. He had lain in that room planning how to get money for the winter. He would have to borrow it, to borrow, not knowing he would ever be able to pay it back. If he died, he would be able to leave his son only a debt of honor to pay when he was old

enough to understand. He went over in his mind all the men he might ask for the money. Bob, of course, but that seemed like asking it of Emily. Swanker would do anything for him, anything to get hold of him. And yet Swanker would lend the money out of pure kindness, Jim reproved himself. If ever there was a man genuinely kindly in his instincts, it was Swanker. Blackwell, too, would lend him money. And there were others. And Jim, lying there deciding whom to ask, got one morning a letter that made him turn his face toward the wall and shut his eyes.

Bob had written it after a memorable dinner with his own wife at home. Martha had left the table. There was just Emily there. The cold wind was blowing discolored dead leaves against the window, with gusts of rain. They had been speaking of starting the furnaces for the winter. And Bob lingered, playing with his fork uneasily. When Emily seemed about to rise, he detained her by blurting out suddenly:

"Emily, Krudineer offered me three thousand for the car to-day."

"Did he?" Emily had never even feigned an interest in cars. "Are you going to let him have it?"

"Yeah. It ain't worth that. I'll never get as good an offer again. Krudineer ought to have his eye teeth cut by this time."

"What kind are you going to have now?"

That was the natural question, for Bob had bought each year, since he had prospered in the garage, a more expensive car than the one of the year before.

"I thought— I don't know as I'll get another one just now. I thought I might use a Ford this winter, if you don't mind."

"A Ford!" Emily had uttered the word incredulously and

with rising excitement. Something awful must have happened. Bob in a Ford!

"What's the matter?" she cried.

And as she looked at him she grew almost faint. He couldn't face her. His eyes shifted. He looked at the table and grew red.

"I got to raise some money," he muttered.

Emily couldn't speak for a moment. She couldn't express the horrible fear that came into her mind. Oh, had he been doing *that* again? Was there some disgrace again impending—some awful thing Martha must know? She could only cry:

"Bob!"

"I got to have some money right away!"

It was only a minute till she spoke with perfect control of her voice. It seemed to her a long time.

"You've got to tell me the truth!" she said.

"By God, Emily!" he blurted out, "what else can I do? I *got* to have the money. Look at Jim! Look at him sick abed, with no money, not knowing where another dollar's coming from. How can I ride around in a Cadillac, with him sick abed? I'd be a damned skunk! *You* don't know what it feels like, not having money, Emily! You can't *imagine!* I've been there. I've wanted to shoot myself because I couldn't earn anything for you! It's enough to drive a man crazy! How can he get well, thinking about money all that time? He's helped me often enough. Licked every kid in town that picked on me. What's the matter, Emily?"

She had risen, tear-blinded, and gone over to him. She put her arms around his neck, as she hadn't done for years. She couldn't speak.

"Emily, you aren't crying! I didn't think you'd mind. You never seemed to like the car. If you feel so bad about it—"

"Oh, Bob! I'm not—crying—about the car! You're so good, Bob! I didn't know—"

"Why, Emily! I never—"

"You're so kind! I haven't liked you so well—for years!"

He had reached up and drawn her face down to him, sputtering, pleased by this unexpected turn of events.

"Aw—Emily!" he protested, embarrassed.

"It's just like you, Bob!"

"Emily, I'd be a skunk not to do it. I wish to Heaven—"

"I wish I could send him some. I've been thinking about it. It would be better for me to get the new car, and for you to send the money. After all, he's your brother."

"We'll lend it to him. He wouldn't take it, of course. Gee! For a minute I thought you was going to—!"

"Oh, Bob, how could you think—"

"But you were going to cry—"

"Well, if I was crying, it was only because you are such a good old dear! I don't appreciate you, Bob! Not half!"

Bob was touched by her earnestness. Her praise made the day rare for him. And after he had gone back to his work, Emily sat and thought a long time about him, and Jim, and life in general. She was ashamed of her suspicion about Bob. After all, it was exactly like him to blush with shame when he was forced to tell her his plans for helping Jim. If she hadn't insisted, he never would have told her. If she didn't know about all his weakness, perhaps she didn't know about all his generosities. She might have had a much worse husband. She might have had one that boasted of his good deeds—that gave money publicly for show. And when she thought of the

months of her treachery against him, when she had planned to betray him, she was ashamed of herself. After all, she reflected, little Martha Kenworthy might be quite as shocked by a revelation of her mother's character, some day, as of her father's.

Bob had spent two days with Jim in Chicago when he was stopping there to rest on his way to California. Bob had been awfully cut up about him. "You ought to see him, Emily!" he had cried as soon as he got home. "He's a shadow. Skin and bones. His color's bad. Looks like it was hard work for him to lift a hand. He keeps twitching his fingers. Hasn't any pep, except when he talks about Bronson. The boy's doing fine, Emily! It beats the band! I never really expected he would. Jim got to see him three times, at some friend's house. Damn that woman! He has to sneak into some man's home to see his own boy! And he's thanking his lucky stars for that school—says it's the best thing ever happened to the kid, if he'll only stay in it. Jim's satisfied he will. But he's lonely. I tell you what I said to him, Emily." He hesitated, and looked intently at her. "I told him we were coming out to California to see him. He looked so bad I couldn't help it. It cheered him up. I didn't say when, but some time after Christmas. I said you'd been wanting to go to California for a long time, Emily, so he wouldn't think anything. And we never have had a trip together like that, have we? Don't you think we could manage it, if I can get Jensen to come into the garage for a month or two? Of course, we'd lose some business. I can see that. But I'd get it back again, and, anyway, Jim looked blue. His lips are kind of tight. He'll have our visit to look forward to, anyway."

So in California, in that sanitarium, Jim had indeed that visit to look forward to, and greatly he needed it. He had never before known what loneliness was. He had been much without comradeship all his married life, he began to realize, but most of the time he had hard work to lose himself in. And last winter, when he had been resting, never thinking he might not get his health back, he had got into the way of thinking of the comradeship he might have had with Emily, if life had gone happily with them. But now it was the boy he thought of continually. He had tasted a friendship, a sort of inexpressible satisfaction in love, that doubled his life. It was the sort of intimacy he had always dreamed of, but realized only those days when he had had the boy back again in his heart, when the boy had been, as it were, for those days, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. He could lie now with his eyes closed, and see that childish face of his, as it had suddenly appeared before him when he lay ill in New York. He had written Bronson that he was so ill he had to get away at once to another climate, and that he wouldn't see him again until next summer. And then one of those horrible, dark, sinking, nauseated afternoons, that boy had been there in the room with him, his young face shining like a star.

And Jim had sent him away, terrified by the chance of contagion. He hadn't let him come near him. And the boy had gone away, that perfect boy, solicitous and manly.

"I got your letter, and I knew they wouldn't let me come if I asked them. So I just beat it. I won't get into trouble. I'll go back and say: 'I been to see my dad. He's sick. Now give me what's coming to me! I'll take it.' Gee! dad, did you think I was going to let you get away without coming to say good-by

to you?" That dear moment was one of many never to be forgotten while Jim Kenworthy lived.

And then, by turns, he chilled with fear. "Suppose I don't get over this! What's to become of him? His mother will have him! He'll never get to come to Bob and Emily. They couldn't have a chance to get him. I couldn't even will my part of him to them. Swanker will help me. I'll write to Swanker. I'll make him his guardian. As soon as I'm able I'll write Swanker. I can't die! I can't die! What's going to become of my boy?" In such misery the days passed.

And then Bronson's letters ceased. Jim wasn't surprised at first. He told himself he had been surprised to get two letters the first week he was in the sanitarium, and three the second. It was wonderful that for four weeks the boy had written steadily. Suppose he didn't write for a week. There was nothing to get blue about. Later he began to wonder if it was possible that the school had got instructions not to let him write to his father. Now what would he do in a case of that sort? At so great a distance from him? He would have to appeal to Swanker to get some news sent him.

But one night—ten days had passed without a letter—Jim, in the unbalanced sleepless hours of the night, began to feel sure that his boy was ill. The epidemic must have reached the school. Bronson wasn't strong. He had grown too fast. He was too thin. He had no resistance. And if his boy had died, who would there be to send word to his father? Wasn't it possible that no one in the school knew his father's address? He felt sure the boy was dead. It was easy enough to jeer at himself for such anxiety when morning came. But the anxiety of the night had made him more weary than ever.

Finally the first telegram came. Jim was propped up in the sun on a long veranda, and when he saw the page at the other end of it, he knew it was for him. He had been right. His hand trembled so he could read the words with difficulty. No, it wasn't the flu—not the flu—

Your son has left to go to you. Kindly inform me of his arrival, and detain. Letters follow.
NICHOLAS VEILE.

Chapter Twenty Four

This shocking, bewildering, relieving message threw Jim's mind into such activity as he hadn't known for days. Now what did those words signify? A calamity, certainly. The boy had left the right school. He must have left it in a rage. He had promised he wouldn't leave it. He hadn't done well. But he had left the school to come to see his father. That was foolish of him, mad of him, but, after all, quite natural. It might be he was having holidays or something. But, no, of course, he wasn't to have any winter holidays. Bronson had made that clear to him. Perhaps—he had had flu, and had to be sent to a better climate to recover. That was likely. But, no, that wasn't at all likely. That was absurd. But still, if he had been ill, if he had to leave school, where would he have been sent, with no home in New York? But, of course, it was plain from the wording that he had run away. "Detain him." Polite, that. "All I want is a chance to detain him!" Jim thought, grimly. "If he's left the school, I'll never be able to persuade him to go back. I'll keep him here with me till she gets back from Europe, at least. She won't come back. She'll know he'll never go back to her. I'll keep him! I'll get tutors for him here." After all, it wasn't to be wondered at. The only surprising feature of the whole affair was that the boy, being such a boy as he was—who had never been in school before, should have settled down to a routine, to a discipline, when one came to think of it. And still, it might be that the boy, thinking that his good conduct for so long had given him, as it were, the upper hand of his superiors, had simply decided to take a vacation, in

spite of them all, and when he had taken his holiday he would go back for a second time as quietly as he had done the first time. "Why should I suspect him of having got into the worst possible mess?" Jim demanded of himself, indignantly. Yet, after all, such suspicions were not entirely unfounded. They weren't altogether unjust, if one considered—well, the affair in the train lavatory, for instance. But, of course, the boy was different now. He wasn't the same boy at all. And besides, don't all children have holidays at Christmas time? Surely Bronson might have been allowed a change, considering his excellent conduct. For almost a minute Jim didn't blame the lad at all for taking a jaunt to see his father. The boy naturally felt uneasy about his father's illness. And he had probably left— Why in the name of common sense couldn't Veile have said when he left, when he was to be expected? "Veile knows certainly that I'm not well," thought Jim, peevishly. "Why couldn't he have sent something more definite? He probably means he was leaving before the message was sent. He can't get here till Monday, at least, now."

"I won't expect to see him till Monday, anyway," Jim resolved, bravely. "I won't expect any more letters." And all that day he sat and interpreted the telegram variously. By night it seemed certain to him that Veile hadn't known when the boy did leave. Bronson had left the school, and they had sent Veile word, and he had telegraphed. So he might see the boy coming in on Sunday.

Even Saturday he got up and dressed early and eagerly. There was just a chance that he might have started soon enough to be getting in to-day, Jim reasoned. He had seen him that night, half dreaming, half remembering, seen him coming unex-

pectedly into a library, between curtains, and catching sight of his father.

"You old son-of-a-gun!" Jim could hear him say, without trying to hide his affection. He knew it was rather foolish to expect him early, but still, all Saturday morning he sat on the veranda where he could look down the driveway in from the road, so that he could see whoever arrived. He sat there on the edge of the chair, all the afternoon, saying that of course it wasn't likely that he would get here till Monday.

On Sunday he sent a telegram irritably to Veile. "When did he leave?" it demanded, tersely. No answer came on Sunday. All day Monday Jim sat on the very edge of the chair, his eyes intent upon the road. Surely he would be arriving soon now. Surely out from *this* taxi, now, a great, lank, tow-headed boy would be unwinding himself. Men arrived. Women arrived. Families arrived. Patients arrived. Visitors arrived on the blinding white driveway, under the palms. But no Bronson appeared. Maybe, of course, he would come walking in. He had a weakness for walking in and saying, "Here I am!" Some place along the way he would be enjoying the prospect of presenting himself alone to his father. Jim could see him planning it. All day Monday passed. But there were trains in the evening. Jim couldn't go to bed. He quarreled with the nurse. The doctor came in and protested. Jim explained that he was expecting his son.

"You've brought up your temperature!" remarked the doctor. "Get into bed. That's no way to receive him!"

And so Jim went to bed.

"Look what you've done to yourself!" the nurse remarked, indignantly, the next morning, putting the thermometer out of

his reach. "You ought to know better! You aren't to get out of bed till noon!"

Still, he could lie and look toward the door, look toward the door till his neck was tired. He could listen down the hall. He could expect that face to thrust itself into the door, couldn't he? Tuesday noon, and no boy yet. What did this mean? Bronson was taking his time, that was sure. Maybe he had stopped off to see—something. He had never been West before, Jim supposed. Still, he would have thought that, knowing his father would be anxious, he would come straight to him. A boy didn't realize what a strain it was to have to wait, uncertainly, when one was ill.

Tuesday afternoon the nurse came to the veranda, looked him over, and said there was a caller who insisted on seeing Jim—no boy—not his son— He wasn't to get so excited. Here was the card. Pollick. James Pollick, of New York. With the firm of lawyers through whom he corresponded with Mrs. Veile about the boy.

"Bring him up!" said Jim, grimly.

A very shy, blushing, white-haired young man appeared. Jim was scarcely able to maintain his savageness. The young man sat nervously. He wiped his brow. He patted his hair. He shifted his feet. He had come from Mr. Veile, privately, very privately. What he managed to say, confused extremely by Jim's cold stare, was this: The boy had run away. Mr. Veile didn't know what to do with him, if he should come back. Mr. Veile was a busy man. He was working for the government for a dollar a year. His work was most important. He couldn't spare time from it. He must ask Mr. Kenworthy, if the boy came to him, to be kind enough, to be patriotic enough, to look after him till his mother could get home to take charge of him.

Mr. Veile would esteem it a great favor if this could be done discreetly, in such a way that Mr. Veile might not seem to connive at the boy's remaining with his father. Mr. Veile had only the greatest respect for the boy's father, for his paternal feeling, and had no doubt the father would enjoy having the son with him. Yet Mr. Veile would not like to seem to his wife to have neglected his responsibility in the matter, for public service.

"I see," snapped Jim. "The devil and the deep sea."

"Oh, scarcely that," the white-haired young man objected. Mr. Veile's war work—Mr. Veile regretted—he had sent this—personal messenger—to offer any help possible—to take the lad back when the necessity absolutely arose—not to seem indifferent to the child's whereabouts. But if the lad could be kept in California till his mother arrived, a great responsibility would be lifted from Mr. Veile's shoulders and he could devote himself heart and soul to his country.

"Exactly!" said Jim. "When is he arriving?"

"Who?"

"The boy. My boy!" exclaimed Jim, peevishly. "When's he getting here?"

"Isn't the boy here now?"

"He is not!"

The young man sat back in his chair. "Where is he?"

"How do I know?" demanded Jim, angrily. "I haven't heard anything. I only got a wire saying he was coming. Not even saying when. I've been sitting here waiting for him till I'm ready to drop!" Jim's anger was rising.

The young man seemed not convinced of the truthfulness of this statement.

"Do you suppose I'm hiding him?" cried Jim, furiously.

"Certainly not. Certainly not. But he left to come to you!"

"*When?* I've asked you before."

"He left last Sunday. A week ago Sunday. He ought to be here. They said he was coming here."

"Who said?"

"He was in charge of a man named Daniels, I believe. I'm certain his name was Daniels. He got away from him. And Daniels said he was coming to you."

"Why wasn't he in his school?"

"I understand he was—put out of the school."

"Why was he put out of the school?"

"I believe—for improper conduct of some kind. I know Mr. Veile tried every way to get him taken back."

"When was he—put out?"

"Two weeks ago, I believe."

"Where was he put then?"

"In charge of the Mr. Daniels. Mr. Veile's war work in Washington—"

"Cut out the war work! I understand what you mean. Where was he with this Daniels?"

"In the New York house of Mrs. Veile, I understand. And he got away from the man. Daniels had warned Mr. Veile that he wouldn't be able to keep him from getting away to go to his—you. And he wasn't. His mother's lawyers demanded he should be brought back immediately, but Mr. Veile thought between you and him you might arrange—he is so busy with other things—"

"I understand," said Jim.

The blond young man sat hesitating nervously, and Jim sat glaring at him.

"What shall I wire Mr. Veile, then?"

"Whatever you please," snapped Jim. "He may be sure I'll detain him, all right, if I get a chance to. I won't send him back again. He's old enough to choose where he wants to live." Jim had committed himself to that position, at any rate.

"That's exactly what Mr. Veile feels." The young man hastened to be conciliatory. "At least, I draw from what he says that that's what he thinks. I wasn't perhaps—authorized to make so broad a statement."

"Damn a broad statement!" Jim cried.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" the youth ventured to ask. "I am at your service as long as I am here."

"I'll tell you what to do. You can disappear. Don't you be in sight when he arrives. Don't you let anyone know that you're in town. I warn you that if he finds out you've come to take him back, there'll be trouble. I'll tell you that right now. You'll have your hands full!"

"I have—been told something—of the sort. I asked before I came up—if there was anyone with you. I want to—carry out your orders in everything. There can be no harm in watching the trains, I suppose?"

"Don't ask me. I won't take any responsibility for what happens to you. Do what you please."

Jim received him more politely when he came cautiously back the next morning. An idea had come into his feverish head during the night, an idea which possibly had great value. He had tossed about, thinking of that man Veile, whom he had never seen. That man's position might be the key to the whole problem. It was bad enough, in all faith, to be the father of a son who set merrily out, without warning, to wander across the continent. But to be the stepfather of a young and giant Hamlet, confined to one's dwelling-place, who kicked

over one's furniture and knocked one's teeth out—from that position how a man must long to escape after even the most lucrative marriage! Wasn't it possible that Veile might be persuaded to insist that his wife let the boy come to his father? "Insist" wasn't a word to be used with Mrs. Veile—but still—what was more likely? Jim had been waiting the coming of the blond young lawyer to learn more about Veile's most natural desire to have the boy kept at a distance.

To his overtures the young man responded eagerly, but with a circumspection which began to change Jim's opinion of his professional fitness. He refused to be pumped, but he insinuated that he imagined that, although it would be difficult, under the circumstances, to approach Veile about so—delicate a matter—still—if Veile could consult only his own inclination—it was possible—nobody could say, of course. To Jim's question about the boy, he gave more definite answers. He understood that the boy had plenty of money when he got away. He understood he was always well supplied with money. He saw no reason for supposing he was "beating his way" or "riding freights." He had no information whatever about the reason for his dismissal from school. He knew Veile had gone from Washington to the school to implore them to look after the boy a short time longer, and they had refused. He didn't know where Daniels was, but he knew that he had said almost definitely that the boy would go to his father, for he hadn't talked of anything else all the days he had spent in New York with him.

Jim hurried Pollick away, not wanting the boy to arrive and find him talking with an advocate of his mother's. They parted on terms of comparative sympathy. Pollick would watch all the trains that arrived; he had had a description given him of

the boy whom he hadn't seen, so that he was sure of recognizing him at once, and he would phone from the station at eleven, or at two, or at five—whenever he came.

And so Jim had not only the door into the long hall to watch, but every time the phone rang, he looked to see if the nurse was coming to call him to answer it. That was Wednesday, and they refused to let him out of bed because of his temperature. He explained to them indignantly that he would be all right as soon as the boy arrived. When the suspense was over, he would be normal, that was sure. He knew that when he saw that son of his, when he had him there to sit chattering on about school, and his friends, he would be well again. There would be health and strength in seeing that young and mighty face. Besides, Jim seemed not so utterly a prey of terrors since the young Pollick was there to talk over all the possibilities of delay. He was ashamed before a man of his silly nightmare fears. How could he say that because he had read in the paper that flu was unusually bad in Detroit, he had felt sure that Bronson was lying ill in Detroit, ready to die of the plague. He couldn't be so old-womanish. He talked of how the boy would be taking his time, enjoying his freedom, seeing the sights. Why, wasn't it possible that he had taken a boat from New York to San Francisco? Certainly it was. It would be quite like him to do that. But under his words, sometimes, Jim shivered.

Pollick came and reported that evening. He reported on Thursday morning. He lingered. Jim found his society preferable to none, and detained him. After all, there seemed not so great danger of the boy walking in suddenly. After a day or two Jim looked forward from the time he left, at eleven, to the hour when he had promised to return in the evening. He detained him as long as the rules allowed, and they talked of what

was going on in the world, Jim lying on his bed, in the veranda, the young man beside him. Jim was getting to like him. It was nothing small to have a visitor to look forward to, to pass the intolerable hours till the boy put in his appearance. Pollick was interesting after his absurd shyness wore away. Jim never could get along enough to talk to him, before the nurse intervened. As long as his temperature kept up, they were determined to keep him still. The young man jumped to obey the nurse's instructions. The doctor had met him down the hall the morning of the second day, and asked him curtly when the boy was to arrive. "It can't go on like this. He isn't in any condition to stand the strain!" Pollick had apologized as confusedly as if he had been the cause of the strain.

A whole, intolerable, impossible week passed, without that dear face shining upon its father, a week whose mornings were like years, so long that a boy might have arrived a thousand times over. In the afternoon, a regiment of boys might have come down that hall one by one, at long merciless intervals. Jim was sleeping only when they gave him sleeping powders now, and waking after them weak and stupid and extremely depressed. He couldn't talk now to Pollick, but he begged that Pollick might be allowed to talk to him, to read him the papers. Pollick had written to Bob all about the situation, all about the disappearance of the lad, all that Jim had dictated to him, and a paragraph more, suggesting that if Bob, as Pollick had understood, intended visiting his brother, why not come now while his brother so greatly needed some diversion? Day by day Jim had been trying, himself, to write to Swanker, to give him what information he had about Veile. He could scarcely trust *that* to Pollick. He wouldn't mention Swanker's name to him. But he couldn't get the letter written. It was

too much for him. It was twelve days after he got the first message from Mr. Veile that he got the nurse to send a long urgent telegram to Swanker, begging him to learn what he could from Bill of the boy's whereabouts, of his intentions when he left, and from the school, about the reasons for his dismissal.

Day after day passed. Finally, one morning by nine Jim had been bathed and rubbed, and fed and dosed, his bed made comfortably fresh, the shades adjusted, the pillows arranged. The morning paper was lying folded on his bed. He sometimes looked at the headlines, but that morning he had not even done that. Pollick might choose, himself, what he would read him. Jim didn't care what was going on in the world. He didn't even care who was winning the war. He was too ill, and too harassed by his own racking anxiety. He had been saying to himself: "I can't stand this. If I don't hear from him to-day I'll go crazy. I can't live this way. Why don't he write? If he was living, he would write!" And through his mind a refrain seemed to beat with a pulse of exhaustion. "I can't stand this, I can't stand this."

And that morning Pollick didn't come on time. What right had Pollick to be late? He hadn't anything to do but wait around, and he couldn't keep an appointment. Pollick wasn't any good, anyway. "If I could get out, if I could get to the station, I'll bet I'd find out something, some way, somewhere. He's an eel. What'd they ever send a man like that out here to get *him* for?" His back ached so much he could see no good in anyone. He twisted about in his uncomfortable bed. It wasn't a bit better than the one he had complained of till they changed it. Probably it was the same old mattress he had had before. No, he remembered he had been transferred from one

complete bed to another bed quite ready for him. As like as not, all the beds in this damned place were as bad as any of them. He turned, and his hand touched the paper. He picked it up and looked at it.

He saw at the first glance a photo of his wife on the first page of the California daily. Above it he saw—"Heir to Millions Missing." And further down, a larger and badly printed picture of Bronson as he had looked two years ago. The lower headlines offered five thousand dollars reward for information concerning his whereabouts.

Chapter Twenty Five

As Jim read that, he felt his stupid mind clear and his spirits rise. The weariness of his body vanished. "She'll never get him!" he cried to himself, with a strange exaltation. "She'll never get him!" He was strong to understand and scorn it all. She had got back and begun her search. How she would be exulting in the publicity of it all! And if she managed it, what a search it would be! Of course the boy hadn't a chance. He was only a foolish child, and she had all that money at her disposal to track him. "She'll never get him!" he exulted. "I'll bet my last hundred she'll never get him!" By the time he had re-read that column he was Swanker's man completely.

It was a galling abomination of misstatement, coarse "sob-stuff," over which, though she had cleverly arranged for its publication, as Jim perceived, her delicate nature could shudder deprecatingly in her own circle. The missing youth was the only son of that well-known leader of all good works for women, that noble and wise dispenser of millions to causes whose merits were beyond question. She had established the Bronson Foundation for the study of children's diseases. She had devoted herself to the welfare of American soldiers. For weeks after she knew of the disappearance of her only son she had stuck to her post in France, caring for orphans and the wounded, carrying on heroically, refusing to desert public service for her private anxieties, though she had instituted from there a private search for her only son that was nation wide. "Women must do their share," she had said to the reporter in New York. "Do generals desert when their babies are ill?"

she had asked. And it was only when she had creditably finished the piece of work on which she was then engaged that she had returned to devote her time to searching for the boy, being delayed by the difficulty of sailings. She had so instilled into him a sense of the duty that he owed to the country that he had quietly left his school and gone into the army or the navy, it was supposed. Although he was but fourteen, he appeared old enough to get into service. He could be recognized anywhere by his extraordinary height and his nearsightedness, a combination striking enough to identify him among a thousand boys. Mrs. Veile was not a woman to withhold her only son from service if he had been of any possible age for it. But he was too young. If he had not gone into the army or navy, it was supposed that he would be in the middle West, or possibly the far West, likely California, trying to get into some form of service. The sympathy of every mother in the nation would be with this patriotic and heroic mother as she carried on her search for her only child. If the child had now, or ever had had a father, that fact was left to the insignificance it deserved.

Jim had been lying straight out in bed when he began that column. He kept shutting his lips more and more grimly as he read down it. Having finished it, he pulled himself up, without much effort, and adjusted the pillows so that he sat erect. And then he read it again. Every line meant for him exactly what it did not say. The angrier he got, the stronger he felt. Pollick came in and looked at him. He saw the change in him and gasped:

"Oh, is the boy here?"

"No, he isn't. He isn't coming here. He's hiding from his mother. Let me see the other papers."

Pollick had brought them all, an armful. "Sha'n't I help you lie down?" he asked. "Let me read this for you."

"I'll read it myself. I'm better this morning." And he took the paper and read the next column of gushing rot, and looked with evident satisfaction at the same poor and well-blurred picture of the boy. Pollick sat watching him with surprise. Jim read them all, one after another.

"He never started to come to me. He's hiding from his mother. She'll never get him."

Pollick nodded tolerantly at this remark.

"I'll bet you my last dollar she won't find him. Do you want to take me?"

"This'll be in every paper in the United States."

"I don't care if it is. She won't get him."

"She has every means of getting him at her disposal."

"That's all right. I'll bet you two to one she don't find him." Pollick shrugged.

"His picture is posted at the railroad station this morning."

"Oh, it is!" cried Jim, resentfully. "He's no criminal, after all. I see now why he hasn't written me. This is going to be some fight!"

The local evening papers had the story of the father of the heir of the Bronson millions. The father of the boy, the prominent New York clubman, was a patient in the Stinton Sanitarium. He had been there incognito, as it were, once before. He had been expecting the boy to visit him. The boy's absence was a severe strain for a man in the condition of that one. It was understood that Mr. Kenworthy had deserted Mrs. Veile some years before. And then having seen that the town and the sanitarium got all the possible advertising from its connection with the famous New York mystery, the paper devoted

itself to the clew which the police had already discovered. Jim had had such a good afternoon's sleep that he could chuckle—angrily, to be sure—over those absurdities. He could imagine Swanker reading the New York papers. He could see the very expression of Swanker's face when he got the clipping that Jim sent him, the first one he had chanced upon that morning. He would be hearing from Swanker soon now.

The doctor eyed Jim in perplexity. Why should such newspaper notoriety cause a man's temperature to go down and his spirits to rise? This patient didn't seem to mind the curiosity which the news had created in the hospital about him. He didn't mind the very maids glancing at him whenever they could, in awe and fear. He didn't mind the new spirit of eagerness with which the nurses served him. He refused to be photographed in bed, and the doctor gave orders that no reporters were to be allowed in the grounds. They did all they could to make the husband of so prominent a millionaire, so great a suffragette, more comfortable, but they couldn't quite see why he should seem to be growing stronger day by day.

He sat up in a chair now, and pored over the papers. He seemed actually to enjoy the clews that were offered. A very tall, lanky white-haired boy, who wore glasses, had been seen in Florida, in Atlanta, in Newark, in Cleveland, on the Lincoln Highway out of Chicago, in two towns of Canada, making across the Mexican border, in Arizona. A tall, stooping white-haired boy had died of flu at Fort Sherman. The millionaire repressed a sort of gasp, reading that. But when he read that the boy was being held for ransom by a band of Western kidnappers, he almost laughed, and when Pollick came, he remarked to him:

"If the boy ever sees that, he'll be tickled to death! It would

just suit him to be kidnapped by bandits and held for a ransom!" And Jim could see him hiding somewhere, poring with eagerness over all the clews that were sent day by day to his mother.

However, the day that Swanker's letter came, a silence seemed to come over Jim. Swanker wrote that he had made every effort to find "Bill," but had not had any success. He had learned that Bill had left his employer in great anger. He had told Mr. Veile repeatedly that he wasn't going to be able to keep the boy, and he wouldn't be responsible for what might happen to him. But Veile could suggest no other plan for keeping him—at least, he didn't. And Bill resented being put in such a position. Veile thought he had enlisted, and that was as far as they had got in their effort to trace him. As to the school, they had accomplished little more. Swanker had got the man to go to see the head, who had got permission from him for Bronson to lunch with his father. This man had been told that for a while the boy had done extremely well, and they had great hopes that they would be able to direct him definitely into some career for which he was so unusually talented. Then suddenly something happened which made it impossible to keep him there another day. When he had been brought into the head's office he had been most offensively insolent and hard, and the head had been entirely unable to impress him with the sense of horror his conduct inspired in him. He had told him he was sending him away—that there was no tolerance, among decent people, of conduct like his. He said he had never had a boy to deal with who seemed so unrepentant, and that finally he mentioned, just on a chance, trying to find some way of touching him, that he was going to write to his father. And at that the boy broke down and wept and cried like a baby, and

really groveled before him. He promised never to do such a thing again, he promised everything the head wanted him to, on condition that his father wasn't to be told what he had done. The head told him he would keep track of him, and if he had any reason to suppose Bronson repeated such conduct he would certainly write the whole story to his father. "And this is the significant thing, Kenworthy. He had said to the boy, when he called him in, that he had a letter all ready to mail to his mother, explaining his offence, but that, on certain conditions, he would refrain from sending a letter so distressing to a woman. The boy said, 'Mail it and be damned!' It was apparent even to the head that you were the one who had all the influence over him, that his mother was nothing to him. That may some day be useful to us, though of course it will be difficult to get a man in his position to do anything for us in the case."

The burden of where Bronson was yielded first place now to the burden of what he was and what he was going to become. Jim understood that Mrs. Veile could have gone abroad only on the supposition that whatever the boy might do, he would be kept at the "reform" school. And he had done something so excessive that the school was justified in breaking its promise to keep him. And Jim remembered with shudders and protests of repulsion the conviction he had had from time to time during the summer that the boy was capable of anything. He remembered all he had said to his son to try to argue him out of his belief in his own capacity for all things base. He recalled the boy's own conviction of his inherited propensities. He recalled the outburst of foulness about his mother that unforgettable afternoon when the two of them had leaped into discussion of their fundamental relationship. He remembered his genius for

enraging people. He recalled that morning when his fury had gloated over his mother's death.

And then he would remember the charm of the child, the loveliness of his good-natured moments, the impressed way that men spoke of his ability, that last, that delightful glimpse of him at the station when Emily kissed him, and he had blushed and spoken to her so lovably. He remembered that cry of innocent delight which had sprung out of his mouth when he came into Swanker's library. "You old son-of-a-gun! And where was he now, and moreover, what might he not be doing there, if in the school, under those so carefully chosen and wisely manipulated stimuli to good behavior, he had done—such things?

That night the horrible nightmare came back. Bronson was being tried for rape, arson, treason, and murder, and his father's tongue was so swollen against his cheeks that he couldn't speak, he couldn't cry out, though they were condemning the lad! There was a great, dusty mob, and a boy dragged along with a rope around his neck. Jim had fever the next morning. He couldn't read the papers the next day. He couldn't talk even to Pollick. Once he asked, wearily:

"There's no more about—Fort Sheridan, is there?"

There *was* no more about Fort Sheridan. There was no statement saying what had been decided about a tall light-haired "gob" who had died there of flu, a lad who spent money like a multimillionaire. Jim could only say to himself: "Of course *he* wouldn't have so much money left! Of course he couldn't have had a great amount when he left the school!" He could only toss about to ease the aching of his back, and wish that he might be better for to-morrow when Bob and Emily arrived.

Bob had had a long interview with Pollick and the doctor

before he went in to see Jim. He was determined to follow their advice to the letter. He wasn't to be greatly concerned about the boy, and he was to talk comfortably and reassuringly. Even without such instruction the sight of Jim, as he came into the room, would have made him walk softly.

"You'd have to laugh, old boy, to see how they are taking it at home. Old George Josephs told me just before I left that he had ordered a hundred extra evening papers the night before, and he was going to order a hundred more to-night. The whole town sits around and waits till the next paper comes, to see what's in it. There's detectives watching everywhere, or at least they say there's about a dozen come from Chicago to watch us, to try to find out something. A stranger can't come into the garage without being suspected of being a detective. I just say, when I have to, that of course the boy wanted to see his father when he was sick. 'You know Jim,' I say. And there ain't a telephone pole at a crossroads in the country that hasn't got a picture of him tacked to it. And, by heck! when I registered at the hotels they asked me if I was the boy's father! The bell boy'll get the surprise of his life if he thinks *I'm* a millionaire! I didn't tell them I was. They just stand around wondering. I tell you, Jim, he did mighty well to stay as long as he did in that school, when he's never been to one before in his life! I never thought he would. That's a good idea of this Pollick's. He thinks the boy is hiding because he doesn't want to live with his mother. If that's the idea, I'll bet my last dollar it'll be a while before he comes out of his hole. I'll bet he's working in some garage. And if he is, I'll bet they're getting the surprise of their life, if he begins talking. He can't hide, though. There ain't another boy like him in the U. S. A. If he gets to talking sense, and that size of his, they'll spot

him P. D. Q. He couldn't pretend he was an ordinary fool if he tried."

Jim wanted to tell Bob the whole tale, but he was too tired. He avoided the depth of it. He shrank from beginning it.

"You've seen Pollick, then?"

"Yes. I had a talk with him. He called as soon as we got in."

"I wish you'd make friends with him, Bob. Maybe Emily would ask him to dinner. He's been mighty kind to me. And I think—maybe—seeing he represents the other side—it would be a good plan to be as—friendly as possible."

"Sure thing. He seems square. Emily'll jump at the chance to cross-question him. She's—well, you know what women are, Jim. She's *worried,* you might say. I told her she was foolish to worry about that kid. But you know how she took to him. I'll tell you what, Jim. I'll call up this afternoon, late, about six. And if you'd had any rest this afternoon, we might come over again this evening. Emily wants to come. She wants to see you."

Bob seemed very strong, sitting there, very mighty. Bob could go walking about and finding out things. It was *good* to have Bob sitting there well and equal to life's demands. And it would be nice to see Emily, to hear her caressing voice asking him about himself, to feel her longing over him. Their very presence strengthened him.

"I'm not so well as I was," he would tell them, when they came day by day. "I was worried for a while about the boy, and then I seemed to get better. But I'm not so well again, just now. If this fever would go down—"

"It's the strain that's wearing him down," the doctor told them. "He can't hold out indefinitely this way. Don't the

boy realize that his father is a very sick man? The thing to do is to put it in the paper. Put in a personal saying that his father's condition requires immediate mental ease. That's the thing to do."

Bronson's case was no longer on the front page. The carnage of Europe had again pre-empted that. He got only a few lines of conjecture in the remote parts of the paper, until his mother doubled the reward offered. Presently she had made it twenty thousand dollars. The multiplied prize drew fresh first-page clews from all parts of the nation. And then the lost child receded to the remoter columns.

It was the beginning of the sixth week since Veile's abrupt telegram when Jim had a second attack of flu. When he had recovered somewhat, realizing the hopelessness of his condition, he pulled himself together one morning and told Bob all the truth about the situation, explaining the lad's hate of his mother and his determination not to stay with her. He spoke of Swanker and his eagerness to take up the case. Bob cursed only beneath his breath, with stronger curses than the one he habitually used for "that woman."

"Why didn't you tell me this before, Jim?" he demanded.

"I was too sick, Bob. I dreaded to—the effort. But now"—it was a significant admission—"I thought I had to. I'm—I'm not getting better very fast."

Bob went to the doctor and to Pollick. The next morning he began, when he came in: "Look here, old boy. How'd it do to put a notice in the papers, saying you're sick and you want to see him. Saying you got to see him for your health's sake. He might see it. He would let you know where he is and how he's getting along. He might come to see you."

"Suppose he would, Bob. If I knew where he was I'd have

to tell. His mother would take him East. I told you she would. She wouldn't let him stay. And then what'd he do? What would become of him then? He might be worse off with her than he is now, for all we know. And I know he thinks if he hides, if he stays away from her, the court will see he ought to be allowed—allowed to get away from her. That's his idea. I tried to talk him out of it, but you know how stubborn he is when he gets an idea. He's showing the judge what he'll do, as he says."

"But, Jim, you'd be better if you knew where he is. It's too hard on you this way. It wouldn't hurt anything to try to reach him."

"Let's not talk about it, Bob. I don't think we ought to do that. I'll think it over—"

The next morning he was still refusing to listen to Bob's plan, and that afternoon a letter came from Swanker. He wrote that he had, himself, seen and talked to Bill in Atlanta. And he had told Bill what he needed to know of the situation. Bill had said he didn't know where the boy was, but if he wasn't with his father, he was hiding from his mother, and he'd bet his bottom dollar that he was safe—not in the navy and not in the army. "Says he got all that enthusiasm out of him. Said he was sorry you were so ill. He had seen all about his mother's search in the papers, and he could tell Mrs. Veile that any time she really wanted to know where the boy was, she had only to broadcast a promise to let him choose where he would live, and he would promise her that she would get an answer from him in an hour after the boy had got the message."

"There's no use talking about that," Jim protested. "She'll never promise that. I know *her*. She'll never surrender to him that way. It would be absolute defeat, from her point of

view, to acknowledge that the boy wanted to live with me. She'll never admit that."

Bob spoke slowly, under great restraint: "Don't you honestly think she would if she knew your health depended on it?"

Jim also spoke slowly: "No, I don't!"

"Then, by God! we'll make her!"

"There's no use trying, Bob. We'd better leave it alone."

Bob went straight in search of the doctor.

"Would my brother have a chance to recover if the boy was found?" he asked.

"Well, he would be better, at least. I've told you that. He's not going to—hold on much longer this way. He's beginning to realize that himself."

"Will you make a statement to that effect?"

"What sort of a statement? What for?"

"If the boy's mother promises to let him stay with his father, he will be with him as soon as he can get here."

"He *will!* What's makes you think so!"

"That's all right. I have reason to believe it."

"Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"I just found it out!"

"Well, it would help, certainly. It *might* save his life. If she can save it, she ought to. Certainly I'll make any statement to that effect you need."

Bob went straight to the telegraph office, with Swanker's letter in his hand. He sent this wire to Swanker, that great man for whose existence he thanked God irreverently:

Brother critically ill. Life depends upon seeing the boy. Please inform Mrs. Veile that unless she takes necessary steps to have him come immediately to his father, I will expose her. Hold her responsible for his death and vagrancy of boy.

ROBERT KENWORTHY.

When he came in to the hotel room where Emily was writing, she got up at once.

"What's happened?" she demanded. Bob was moving with a new sort of powerful stride, and his face was hardened with a purpose.

"Emily, I'm not going with you this afternoon. You'll have to take Martha and get some one here to go with you. I've found out something important. It makes me so damned mad —I could— All that damned woman has got to do to find out where Bronson is is to say he can live with his father, and he'll come to us. He'll be here in a day or two. I got to wait till I get an answer to my wire. I can't go way."

"Why, Bob!" gasped Emily, standing stock-still. "What do you mean? How do you know?"

"Bill says so. You know that Bill he was always talking about? Jim got a letter. Bill says he's hiding till his mother promises to let him come to us. All right, I say. She'll let him come now. Jim's just about—he's bad to-day, Emily. I've wired her."

"You've wired his mother? What did you say? Was Jim willing?"

"*I'm* doing this, I tell you. Jim's too sick to know about it. He can't take his own part. I've told her to get the boy here or I'll hold her responsible for—whatever happened to Jim!"

"Why, Bob! What can you do? How can you hold her responsible? Did you go to a lawyer to find what you could do?"

"No, I didn't. I knew what to do. I'm a lawyer. I've got some sense. She can't treat Jim this way. You take Martha and go after lunch, and I'll wait for the answer."

"Oh, Bob, I'll wait too! Do you suppose—this is true? Oh,

do you suppose he will really come right away?" Tears came into Emily's eyes.

"No, Emily. You go on. Martha hasn't seen anything since we got here. We just sit around and wait till it's time to go to the sanitarium. You'll get back before I get any answer, maybe, anyway. It'll be easier for you to wait, riding round looking at things!"

Bob was suddenly so strangely commanding, she remained silent.

"I hope Jim won't mind you doing this, Bob."

"When he sees the kid, he won't mind anything!"

Emily had no reply to this.

"You didn't even mention this to Pollick."

"No. Why should I? I'm taking the responsibility for this, I tell you."

She couldn't argue with him, nor make suggestions. She couldn't even express her misgivings at his interference. He had acquired an authority of manner of which she hadn't supposed him capable. A sternness had entered into him which made her afraid of him.

When she came home late in the afternoon from the motor drive, he had this telegram to show her grimly:

My forces at your disposal for most vigorous co-operation. Leaving immediately to interview Mrs. Veile in Chicago.

"Who is this man?" Emily asked.

"Jim's lawyer. He knows her. He knows all about her. He knows the kid, too. He'll get to Chicago in the morning. To-morrow, anyway. He'll see her, and we'll know what she says to-morrow afternoon, Emily. We'll have him day after to-morrow. Soon—anyway!"

"But look here, Bob. Maybe she won't do it. Maybe she won't be coerced this way. What forces are these this man puts at your disposal?"

"Publicity. Do you suppose that dame wants the truth told about her? We'll have him day after to-morrow, I tell you!"

"But you don't know, Bob. He may be in France! He may be—in the navy—some place."

"Navy nothing! He's in some garage."

"Are you going to tell Jim to-night?"

"No. Not till I hear from her. I've wired Swanker to hurry up. I told him every hour counted for Jim. To-morrow night I ought to hear from him. And then he'll get a night's rest. He'll be better. You'll see, Emily!"

"Of course he'll be better if Bronson turns up. So will we all. But I don't know how you can be so sure. So many things—may have happened."

"Well, something happened when I sent that wire, that's sure. And something'll happen when Swanker tells her what's what. He can lay down the law to her. She's whipped, I tell you! We've got the goods on her. I'm going along now, Emily. I won't be long."

Chapter Twenty Six

THAT afternoon Jim, looking at his brother from the great distance of his weakness, felt his strength even more than usually. Bob looked like omnipotence, some way. And when he spoke, it wasn't as a man making idle conjectures.

"I got a hunch the kid's turning up soon now, Jim. I've felt it all day. What'll you bet we see him in a day or two? By heck! I never felt anything in my bones this way before in my life!"

He looked as if he felt something in his bones. Jim almost believed with him. Strength seemed a marvelous thing—power to move strongly about a miraculous thing—something far away which Jim Kenworthy could only dream of wistfully.

"It stands to reason this can't go on all winter, doesn't it?"

"But what'll happen if he does come? She'll try to take him away!"

"We won't let her, Jim. Not till you're better. I won't have it, I tell you! I'll see that he's kept here."

It sounded pleasant. Jim wouldn't have taken any stock in such jabber if only Bob hadn't looked so mighty and decided.

As he went out of the room and down the hall, the doctor and the nurse met him.

"The boy's found," said the doctor. "There's a wire for your brother. What do you want done?"

"Found!" cried Bob.

"They have just phoned this message:

Salt Lake City. Bronson Kenworthy critically ill of pneumonia in City Hospital. Identification beyond doubt. Come at once.

It was addressed to Jim.

"Pneumonia! When can I get a train?"

"You can drive to the main line. What shall we do about telling your brother?"

"Pneumonia!" repeated Bob, dazedly.

"I believe it would be wiser not to tell him, just yet. We can see what develops. It would be no relief, with only that much information—to tell him."

"May not be our boy! This isn't good news!"

"It wouldn't be any relief to his father, I judge."

It certainly wasn't any relief to Emily. "Pneumonia!" she cried. "Oh, Bob! I hate that word. It's a terrible thing! You didn't tell Jim, did you?"

"No. The doctor said not to. I'll wire you, Emily, and if he's doing well you can tell him."

"And if he isn't doing well—"

"We got to hope for the best, Emily!"

"Oh, don't ask me to tell him! Don't ask me that!"

"Pollick's going, too. I phoned him from the hospital."

"Bob, maybe it isn't really Bronson."

"I thought of that. They said the identification was beyond doubt."

"Oh, I wish he was just lost! It was better not to know anything than this!"

"If he's very sick, it's a good thing we know it. I'll be there to take care of him."

"His mother'll be there, won't she?"

"By God! I don't care whether she is or not! But I'll be!"

"Oh, Bob, I wish he was just lost!" And Emily began to cry softly.

She cried most of that night, bitterly, suffering Jim's ap-

proaching pain. It seemed to her that the boy was already lost to him, already destroyed by the disease. She had no doubt, no relief from that conviction. He was dead, there, and Jim would never see his living, young, beautiful face again. And Jim would suffer that intolerable loss, the loss whose very anticipation racked her strong body with agony—Jim would suffer that, being weak and ready himself to die. The very fountains of tears continually seemed bursting open within her, as if she was giving birth to the hard substance of grief. Jim would have to be told that he had lost, forever, that lovely child. She would never tell Jim that. She wasn't strong enough. She couldn't rise to the need. She had loved him too much. She could weep all night for him, but she couldn't do that.

It was no surprise when Bob's telegram came to her. She had dressed to go to the hospital and she was prepared for what she learned.

> Our boy died at four this morning. He was taken from train sick. Nothing more known yet. Returning to-morrow.

She went directly to the doctor, her face swollen and distorted with tears. "Do whatever you think best," she said. "This will kill him. I can't go in. I can't go into the room."

The doctor considered. "He's worried about your husband's absence. He suspects something. I may as well tell him. You might wait. You may want to speak to him afterward?"

"I'll stay." She wept softly. "I can't just leave him alone."

She followed him down the hall, striving to stifle the sound of her intolerable pain. They were marching toward him; they were going into his room with this errand of death, the doctor

and the nurse. She sank down on a bench in the hall. She listened. She couldn't hear what was being said.

"He doesn't realize it yet," the doctor assured her, coming out. I said: 'Kenworthy, I've got bad news for you. The boy is dead.' And he said, 'Dead?' I said, 'Yes.' And he shivered and said, 'Oh, well—!' I didn't think he understood. I said, 'It's *your* boy, Kenworthy. He had pneumonia. He died this morning.' And he said, 'It's the best thing for him,' and turned over away from us. I told him your husband had gone and what he had found out. He just said, 'Thank you.' He hasn't realized it yet."

"But when he does—will some one be with him? Is there danger—"

"No immediate danger. The nurse will be with him."

After a long time the nurse came quietly out. "He's quite still," she said. "His pulse is almost normal. Would you like to go in—just to sit quietly?"

Emily crept in, and sat silently in a chair near the door. Jim seemed not to have seen her. He lay on his back, his face turned away, perfectly quiet, his thin legs and shoulders sculptured by the soft sheet stretched over him. An hour passed and he hadn't moved. If it hadn't been for that slight rising and falling of the sheet, she would have feared he was dead. At half past twelve he stirred painfully and turned half consciously to find relief in another position. And as he turned his head he caught sight of Emily. He saw her sitting there, and she saw him. Their eyes met. She saw that unresponding face of bitterness and grief. She gave a little cry and rose up and fled. In the hall she had realized what she had done. She had fled from his sorrow, driven away by his withdrawal from

her. He had turned away from her; in his need he had no need of her.

To the nurse she said: "I have to go and see to my daughter. I left her alone in the hotel. You will phone me, won't you, if there's the least change? You will be sure to. I shall be waiting to come."

At four she could stand it no longer, and called up. Mr. Kenworthy was standing the shock as well as could be expected. He had wept a long time, and they had given him a sleeping powder at three thirty, which had already taken effect. He would probably sleep several hours.

"Oh, nurse," she begged, "couldn't you keep him asleep till my husband comes? Don't let him—lie and suffer to-night, will you? If you could only keep him from suffering so—"

At ten that evening he was still sleeping.

"Couldn't I come and sit near him, so I could be there when he wakes, doctor?" she begged by phone. "I would sit very quietly. I can't endure to think of him waking up and finding himself alone there."

"I think it would be better for him not to find you there, Mrs. Kenworthy—under the circumstances. Not at night."

"Very well, doctor," she answered, humbly. She agreed to the decision because she felt that Jim would rather be alone than have her with him. That look he had given her at noon was the climax of her pain. Well, she had renounced her right to share his grief when she renounced his love. And she was paying now for that decision—a bitter price.

She met Bob at the station. Even the sight of her own face in the mirror had not prepared her for the sight of Bob. His broad, flabby face had collapsed pitifully. There were great seams through the unshaven gray pallor of it from his eyes

across his cheeks, and from the corners of his mouth to his chin. His lips trembled as he greeted her.

"The Stinton Sanitarium," he said to the taxi man.

But Emily protested: "Bob, you mustn't go straight there. Not looking that way. Come back to the hotel. You must shave and bathe. You can't let Jim see you this way!"

He stared at her docilely and muttered, "All right!"

They got into the taxi and started down the street. Bob looked fixedly out of the window on his side, and never said a word. Emily could scarcely trust herself to speak.

"Oh, Bob, I want to know about him!" she cried at length.

After a few seconds Bob answered, looking away from her: "Not now, Emily. If I did, I couldn't go to Jim. You wait. I'll tell you both then—as soon as I get a bath." He turned his face toward her. His lips trembled. He turned away, and she sat weeping softly.

Yet the bath and the shave didn't seem to alter his appearance to any advantage. He said never a word as they drove to the sanitarium, and Emily, understanding that he was making heroic preparations for facing Jim, for telling his poor story, held on to her tears with all her might. She hadn't been able to go to Jim. But Bob had now to go.

The doctor entered the room with them. Jim was lying on his back and he saw them as they came in the door. Bob went over to the bed. He took Jim's hand.

"How are you to-day?" he asked, bending toward him.

"Better," said Jim. His face was hard and blank and gaunt. Emily dared only to look hurriedly at it from the chair she had taken next to the dresser against the wall. The doctor felt Jim's pulse, nodded to Bob, and went out. Bob walked twice

from the window to the door, without speaking. As he passed the bed the third time Jim murmured:

"Well?"

Bob stopped at the end of the bed. He held firmly to the white iron rail. Emily saw his hand clinched around it.

"We went to the hospital, and then we went to the morgue." He stopped, unable to go on. He began, unable to endure the silence he had made. "He looked just like a baby, Jim." Jim had shut his eyes. "I stayed there. I stayed with him. Pollick went to look up an undertaker. The boy was in the morgue." Bob began walking heavily back and forth, his arms folded behind his back tensely. "Then we went to the undertaker's place with him. Then I went and hunted up the doctor. I told the doctor—you wanted to know everything. He was on the train that morning—when they came calling for a doctor. The boy had got out of his berth and tried to get to the toilet, and he had fallen against the door of the men's room. You know how they open. He fell right into the roomful of men, in a dead faint. The doctor thought he was—gone, even then. Knew at once he was bad. They were getting into Salt Lake, and he worked over him till they got in, and telegraphed for an ambulance. They had tried to find out who he was on the train. They went through his things, and there wasn't a thing in his pockets to identify him. That was strange, in itself. And by the time they got him to the hospital—of course, he had a ticket to come here—the police began to guess who he was. He came to, after while. They worked on him all morning. The doctor saw then there was no chance of saving him. And when he came back and saw him, and the police were trying to get to him to make sure, he went in to him, with the chief of police and a detective—a plain-clothes man. And he said to him—he told me he

said to him—'Look here, my boy.' He said you could be sure they had done everything for him, Jim. They treated him white. The doctor has boys of his own. He said to him: 'Look here, my boy. You may as well answer our questions now at once. Tell us who you are, for you haven't got long to live. We want to send word to your people.' And there he lay, so sick, ready to die. And the doctor said he opened his eyes and just glared at them. He looked straight from one of them to the other. And he said to them—" Bob suddenly went to the window, and stood there with his back to the listeners. He stood there an interminable time. When he turned back to Jim his face was all loosened and dissolved in tears, which were no longer to be resisted.

"He said to them, 'You needn't think you can scare ME *that way!*' And he shut his eyes and never said another word!" Bob sobbed and gathered himself together again.

"By God!" he cried. "*That* would have identified him if I'd never seen him! You couldn't scare *that* boy with a little thing like death!" He walked back and forth, blowing his nose—crying unashamed.

Emily was trying not to cry. Jim lay with his eyes shut, ghastly pale.

"There wasn't a thing that could be done, Jim. I believe that doctor would have done everything for anybody. And of course he knew then who he was. The police had telegraphed right away to his mother. But it was the doctor who got your address from them and wired you afterward, because when he got delirious he called for you. He had enough heart to wire us." Bob stopped and wiped his face, made a desperate effort to go on calmly.

"I went to the police and looked his things over. The police

had his clothes. He had on a cheap kind of a green suit, and cheap clothes, and a sort of canvas suitcase. There wasn't a thing to tell who he was. Not a letter or a label left on any of them. The boy had seen to that. There was a couple of shirts, and two suits of underwear, and some cheap blue silk socks. Not even glasses. He hadn't any glasses with him. There was a lot of chocolate and a big bottle of hair paste and a box of writing paper."

"There were two letters in the box, and one in his coat pocket. I brought them with me. They wouldn't let me have them—though. They're all to *you,* Jim."

Bob stopped at the bed and handed them to him, unfolding the cheap lined pages one by one. The first letter the hungry eyes looked at was short. "Dear Father," it began, and said no more. It had no date, nor any address. Bob unfolded the second letter. "Dear Father," the boy had written. Dying, it saluted him. There was nothing else on the page.

The third letter was longer. It was worn and wrinkled, from being carried in a pocket. It had no date or address.

"Dear Father," it began, "I didn't mean—" And that was all.

"They wouldn't let me have these," Bob began. He didn't explain how he got them. "I wanted to bring the suitcase down. She got his body. Anyway, he was ours—he was *yours,* Jim."

There was a long silence in the room. Emily broke it, unsteadily, by asking, "But she didn't get there—while he was living?"

"No, she didn't. She got there just as I was leaving. She came to the undertaker's." He walked back and forth. "I got a chance to speak to her, and, *by God! I spoke!*"

"Oh!" moaned Emily, covering her face with her hands, before the cruelty of that tone. Bob was helping Jim to turn

on to his side. He glanced at Emily in surprise. There was nothing more said. Emily wept, and Bob paced about, and moments passed.

"Don't you know where he got on to the train?" Jim asked.

"Yes. It was in Colorado. That's all they do know yet. It'll be investigated, of course. We're sure to hear where he's been, in time. He looked like a baby, laying there. Just like a little boy asleep, Jim."

Bob sat down, his elbows on his knees, his face in his hands.

"Bob," Jim called, faintly, after a few moments.

"What is it, Jim?" Bob bent over him.

"Ask them—ask the doctor if I can't have a sleeping powder. I wish—I'd like to sleep awhile."

"All right, old boy."

"Maybe we'd better be going, Emily," he whispered, as the nurse answered.

But Jim said, "Don't go yet."

The nurse gave him what he asked for. Bob sat near his bed, bending toward him. Emily was pacing up and down the long hall, trying to get possession of herself. Bob joined her there, presently.

"He's sleeping," he said.

Chapter Twenty Seven

It seemed to Emily that the sensation of waiting for something had held her in its grasp ever since she had arrived in California. They had waited from hour to hour for news of their boy. They had waited from night to morning and from morning to afternoon in the hope that Jim might some way seem a little better. They were still waiting. When they had been waiting for the boy, they had been uncertain of the outcome of their vigil. There was no uncertainty now, for they were waiting to take Jim home to his mother. And there was now not the least doubt that he would be ready to go before many days. It seemed to Emily that he was living now for the sake of finding out where his son had been and how he had come by his death.

The newspapers had silly conflicting reports of the affair. Some said that he had been held for ransom by bandits. Some said that he had been hiding on a ranch in Colorado. Jim turned sickened from these rumors. "Wire Swanker. Ask him to find out for me," he had begged of Bob. And then they waited for a few hours together for the answer to their message.

"Daniels anxious to explain all to Kenworthy. Must have six days for the journey. Shall I send him?" Swanker wired.

Bob sought out the doctor. "Is there any chance—he will be able to see the man when he comes?" he demanded.

"There's some chance. Does he want to see him?"

"It's the last thing we can do for him, doctor. I think he

could—I think he'd be more comfortable if he could know what's happened."

"You know I can't promise anything. He may—be able to listen. He may not. I can't say."

Bob said to Jim next morning: "Look here, old boy, I got some good news for you. Bronson's friend Bill is coming out to see you. He knows the whole thing."

Jim had been lying silent since the news came. He answered Bob at once, apparently without a great effort: "When's he coming?"

"This is Wednesday. I think he'll get here on Tuesday. He had to have an extra day."

After a moment Jim said, "That's the one man in the world I'd like to see. Who's paying his way?"

"I am!" Bob spoke fiercely. "I couldn't do anything for the boy when I got there. But I paid the doctor."

Jim couldn't protest. He spoke again: "I wanted to see him."

"So did I."

"Did he know all the time where he was?"

"I don't know. I don't suppose so. What makes you think he did?"

"I just wondered."

"Well, he knows now, anyway."

"Bronson thought a great deal of him."

"There must be something in him, when the kid took to him."

"He could manage him."

"That's nothing. Anybody could manage him if he liked them. The men in the garage sent some flowers to New York for him, Jim."

"Did they?"

"Ye-ah. It was pretty nice of them. Emily's had a good

many letters, Jim. Everybody could see he wasn't a common kid."

At length the day came that Jim lived for. Emily and Bob led Bill Daniels into the room where he lay, slightly propped up, to receive him. Emily saw Jim's surprise when he entered. She and Bob, too, had almost gasped when they had found him at the station. For the man who had managed Bronson was small and insignificant in appearance. At first glance one saw no sign of power about him. He looked strangely old for the uniform of youth and strength. His khaki coat fitted loosely and awkwardly about his shoulders. His hair was streaked with gray and very closely cropped, and some of it stood up in a little, stiff pompadour above his forehead. His features were small and neat and regular, his eyes were gray and deep sunk, and overhung by puffy eyelids. He had a singularly sensitive nose. His nostrils had a way of quivering delicately and nervously. It was apparent that in spite of Bob's efforts to reassure him, this interview was an unspeakable ordeal for him.

"Here he is, Jim. I told him you were waiting to see him. He thought maybe—we might blame him for something, Jim. I told him we didn't feel that way at all. There's no one we'd rather see than you, Daniels," Bob insisted.

Jim reached out a hand to him.

"He told me a great deal about you. I often wanted to thank you!"

"You'd better wait till you know what I done, sir. I never thought it would end this way, sir! I didn't know— I done what I thought was best—"

The man could scarcely trust himself to speak.

Bob gave him a chair directly in front of Jim's bed, so that

Jim could look at him comfortably. Emily sat down near the door, and Bob stood leaning against the window.

The man began passionately: "I wouldn't have done it if I could have knew how it would end. It was my fault, you might say. I'd of given my life for that boy, sir!"

Bob interrupted him. "Don't be talking that way! Don't feel so bad! What we want to know is, where was the boy from the day he left school till the end. Bronson was at this man's sister's ranch all the time, Jim. Safe as anything till the day he left. That was the night before—he got into Salt Lake. Now you begin, Daniels."

"I tell you I never liked children. I never took much to kids. But if I'd known how it was to turn out—"

"They put us out of here at twelve. It's the rules. We haven't got much time to talk," Bob insisted.

"Oh, Bob," Emily murmured, "give him time! Let him tell it his own way."

Bill was sitting erect and nervous in his chair, turning his hat brim round and round in his small, rough hands.

"I was in Washington with Veile when the wire come," he began, swallowing. "Veile was up in the air when he got it. He didn't know what to do with the kid. He thought they had him settled there. He wired them to keep him, and they wouldn't. 'You go to New York and get him,' he says to me, 'and I'll go and make them take him back.' So I went to New York, and there the kid was, with two teachers. He never said a word when he seen me. He was dazed like. There wasn't anybody in the house but the caretaker. I fixed things up and got a cook for us. And he never said a word for a week. I couldn't even get him to talk. It made me nervous. I didn't know what to make of him. I wired to Veile to make some

arrangements for him, for I seen I couldn't keep him there long. I couldn't tell what he was thinking about. He wouldn't even come into the shop and work. I just hung around with him in his room."

Bob wanted to help him on when he came to a halt. "How long did you stay with him there?" he asked.

"It was two weeks, all but a day. Before he went away I mean. He didn't hardly speak for a week. It didn't seem right for a kid to be so blue. Then I got him to talking a little. He was sore. That's what was the matter with him. Sore about getting put out of that school. 'What'll I do now?' he says to me. 'My dad won't want me now. He won't fight for me now, since I'm rotten,' he says. And I said—"

"Mr. Daniels!"

He turned abruptly to Emily.

"I want to ask first of all—I want to understand. *Why* was he put out of that school? What had he done?" Emily couldn't hide her indignation.

Bill grew red. His nostrils twitched. "I was just coming to that," he murmured. "I ain't just plain about it myself." And he turned to the men for help, and hurried on: "I says to him, 'If that's all that's eatin' you, cheer up. Don't be a fool,' I says to him. I tried to cheer him up all I could. I seen him mad before, but it didn't seem natural to see him blue, a kid like that. I says to him, I don't know how many times: 'If your father said he'd fight for you, he'll fight for you. It don't matter what you've done,' I told him. I—"

"But what *had* he done?" Emily asked, with some impatience.

Bill seemed now prepared against such a demand. He paused a moment, gathering his shamelessness together, as it were, for lying, and then looked directly at her.

"I never *did* understand what he done," he replied, respectfully, humbly. "You couldn't quiz that boy about anything he didn't want to. Maybe you seen that yourself, madam. He wasn't that kind. I never did find out what all the row was about." And then as if he'd done his best for the lady, he started to take up his story. Then he suddenly turned to Jim and added:

"But he says to me—I don't know how often—'I'd of been a good kid if they'd of let me stay with my dad.' But I figured out that if you thought as much of him as I did, you'd fight for him, all right, anyway. And I told him that. There wasn't any other way to cheer him up. He didn't think about anything else, ever."

He paused. And then he burst out again, at a loss to know how to explain his meaning.

"That boy never thought about anything else after he came back from you folks." He included Bob in his gaze. "I never seen anything like the day he got back. I couldn't believe my eyes when I seen the kid. I was standing there waiting for him, and I seen him get off the train, and of course I looked around to see some one else with him. And he seen that, right away, and he yells at me, 'You needn't look to see who's with me,' he yells, 'because I'm *alone!* There ain't nobody with me, and my father's going to *fight* for me,' he yells, right out at the top of his lungs in the station, there. He shook hands with me and he pounded me in the ribs. I thought the kid was drunk, for a minute. 'My dad lets me travel *alone!*' he yells. He was all lit up, as they say. He hauled me into the restaurant, and he couldn't eat for telling me about you. I just sat and stared at him. I couldn't believe that was *my* boy. 'You got to help my father get me!' he kept saying."

He paused helplessly. He couldn't give expression to his emotions.

"I've worked for Veile twelve years. He's stuck to me through everything. He's been a good boss. I'll say that for him. I never thought I'd go against Veile. But by the time the boy had eat his breakfast I was on your side, if I went against every friend I had in the world. 'Sure I'll help them get you if you'll behave this way,' I says to him. I pumped him about you all. I seen right away you knew how to take him. He was a good kid always if you took him right."

Jim seemed unable to lie still. Bob came and rearranged his pillows, and when he saw they were waiting for him to go on, Daniels began:

"He never stopped talking till I put him on the train for his school that night. He never stopped to draw his breath. He was all lit up, all day. I never seen anybody so tickled as he was. We sat in the park all the afternoon, just talking. When I seen him off that night, I felt like a new man."

He stopped and glanced nervously at Emily. He saw her keen, kind gaze fixed upon him, and he turned to the men.

"If you'd 'a' seen him before he went West to you, you'd know how I felt. I'm telling you the truth when I say everybody in the house but me was afraid of that boy. He scared them. They didn't know how to take him. And when I seen him there in the station, I knew right off something had happened to him. He was different. I didn't know what you'd done for him, but I was certainly thankful to you. I never had a schooling. I wasn't anyone fit to take care of a boy. But there wasn't anybody else to do it, then. And I was just about all in, looking after him all the time, when he went West."

He dropped his hat. He picked it up nervously. He looked

from one to the other of them, uneasily, and saw only approval on their interested faces. But he couldn't go on.

"You made him understand, then, that I would want him?" Jim murmured.

"Go on," Bob urged. With his eyes fixed on Jim, Bill resumed:

"I says to him, 'Of *course* your father wants you. There's other schools in the world besides that one,' I says. 'What you've done, you've done. Now forget it!' I talked to him like that for hours. 'Forget it,' I says to him, 'and go on and behave yourself. Your dad ain't going to hold it against you. He'll understand how it was—' And once he says to me, sitting there looking like suicide, you might say, he says to me, 'You don't know my dad,' he says. 'He ain't any hard-boiled guy like *us*, Bill,' he says to me. 'He remembers things like that. He'd jump in front of a train before he'd do a thing like that,' he says. . . . Sometimes, sir, I used to get jealous of you, almost, he thought so much of you! And I says to him—I had to get him out of it some way, 'You notice your dad ain't jumping in front of no trains,' I says to him. 'He's making himself comfortable in California where it's warm,' I says to him. I didn't know you were so sick, sir. And finally I got him cheered up some. I got him to promise he'd write you himself about it. He was just getting right again, and then—"

"And then what?" Bob couldn't stand these long pauses.

Bill spoke desperately: "I don't know how much you folks know about it. I don't know if you understand how things was. I don't want to say anything—wrong! But the kid found out his mother was coming home!"

"We understand," Jim managed to say.

"And that was my fault, too, you might say. I wasn't quick enough. He seen Veile's wire. I wasn't quick enough."

They had all to try to reassure the man.

"Oh no!" Emily protested. "I'm sure you did what you could!" And Bob said:

"Keep cool, Daniels! We want to know it all. Now, tell us what happened."

"I don't know how to tell you. You all knew the boy. You've heard tell of these here brainstorms! There was a cyclone! I can't tell you how it was exactly. If you never seen him that way—"

"I understand perfectly, Daniels," Jim said.

"It lasted four days. I couldn't do a thing. Not any more than though I was fighting with a cyclone. It was the worst one I ever seen him have. I did my best. I didn't let him get away. I kept wiring to Veile in Washington that I couldn't manage him. I wired I was leaving. I seen I was in for trouble. I knew something was going to happen. Veile wired me to keep him. He knew I wouldn't just go off and leave the kid to himself. His mother was coming and she'd make some arrangements. That's all I could get out of Veile!"

In the pause now, from very decency, no one urged him on.

"After all," he began, earnestly, "the boy was crazy. There's no doubt about it. He had wild ideas in his head. And nobody could get them out of him. He was too young to know so much. I figure that it ain't healthy for a boy to have so many ideas in his head when he's fourteen. It ain't natural. He was too sensitive—about some things, that is. And if I could of kept him there, if I hadn't of let him go and he had of been there when *she* got home, what would have happened then? I tell you, sir, it might have been worse than this! I'd have pulled

out of it before he got at her. She was a little woman, and the boy was—just crazy—about some things! When you think of the way he used to look at her—it wasn't natural some way.

"I had him there, and she was coming. Anyway, I didn't let him get away. I didn't call the police! I was going to. I was ready to, more than once! But I knew that if I'd of called the police, that would of been the end of everything with me for him. He couldn't have ever trusted me again. And I couldn't get any help out of Veile. He wouldn't come, and I didn't want him to. He wouldn't come anywhere near the boy when he could help it. And he wasn't a coward, either. I can tell you that. I seen him go in through the smoke when the Van Der Felts' place burned in the country, to get the maids off of the fourth floor. He's got the scars of that fire on his hands yet. But he wouldn't come near the boy.

"He was out of his head. He just kept on talking about her. He didn't talk right. He was raving. I couldn't do a thing. I never liked her, myself, but I never let him talk that way if I could help it. I couldn't shut him up. He swore at me because I was on her side, because I wouldn't let him get away before she got there. And he cussed himself for ever getting put out of that school. He wished he'd run away instead of coming back East. It went on for four days! Honest to God, sir, the boy was out of his head!"

There was so long an agonized silence, that at length Jim asked, quietly, "What happened, in the end?"

Bill's words burst forth: "You don't *know* me. You don't have to believe what I say. I can't *prove* anything. There was just him and me there. It was six o'clock at night. He hadn't hardly eat a thing for them four days. Neither had I. I was just a-opening the door to take what the cook had brought us.

We were on the fourth floor, and the pavement was just below the window. And that boy—if I had of been one second later, sir, I never could have grabbed him. I pulled him in!"

He seemed not to realize that drops of sweat were rolling down his forehead. He got up abruptly. He reached out and took hold of the iron end rail of Jim's bed, and standing there, leaning over it, he went on, trembling.

"If it's my fault what happened to him after, anyway, I saved his life then! I got him down on the bed and sat on him, because he begun to cry. He was crying so hard he couldn't fight any longer. I couldn't have held him if he hadn't begun to cry. He was a bigger man than me. He went on crying like a— It was hell. Excuse me, madam, for saying it! I thought I would go crazy before he stopped that noise.

"He cried till one o'clock. He shook all over, from his head to his feet. He cried like a baby and he kept a-asking me to help him. 'I ain't got anybody but you to help me, Bill,' he kept saying, 'and you're on her side.' He shook so hard he shook me, too, when I tried to sit on him, because I had to hang hold of him. I never took my eyes off him till he went to sleep. I didn't know when he might make for the window.

"He cried like that till one o'clock, begging me to get him into the army or the navy. And after he got to sleep he went on sobbing a long time. His legs shook after he was asleep, even. I piled what I could in front of the windows—furniture —and I sat there watching him. He might of woke up."

Emily moaned.

"He wasn't *my* boy, either, you might say. But I had to make up my mind what to do with him. Who could I go to? If I'd only let him go into the navy! I haven't thought of

anything else since I seen it in the papers. I heard a newsie calling it. It seemed like—

"I didn't see till next morning what a hole I was in. I was just thinking about him that night I heard it, and I begun to get scared for my sister. You can't believe what you see in the papers, but I could see they might try to make it hot for her. I went and got leave, and beat it for Swanker. I didn't know what might happen next, sir. When I sent the kid away, I figured I'd be in France long before she got home. I never thought of anything like this!

"But you can see for yourself how it was. There I was, sitting on him to keep him safe, watching him sleep all night. He was worn out with crying and being so mad. He was white. And I couldn't tell what minute he might wake up and start in again— If you hadn't 'a' been so far away, sir—" Another silence. "You can see what I might have done. I might have called the police and said to them, 'Here's a kid that'll hurt himself if he gets a chance!' I told her once before when she had him locked up in that room she ought to have bars put on the windows. She thought I was dippy. I could hold him when he was tired and crying. But if he woke up strong, after a sleep— He was smooth, too, about getting away from me. One day before he went West I had him out walking, and he beat it for the enlisting booth. I got there just in time. The Canadians knew better than to take *him* when I got through with them. And if he should try something new on me in the morning, when he woke up—

"Or I might of let him go. He'd of went into the navy. They'd of took him. There was men standing around everywhere ready to swear that any baby was their son, eighteen, for a quarter. Maybe it would have been better if I had of let

him went into the navy. But after all, he was only a kid. And they might have court-martialed him if he tried those stunts on them.

"I was sitting on his bed when it got light. It was snowing. And all of a sudden the whole thing came into my head at once. I was tired myself, then, and I was figuring how to get him into some safe place—on the ground floor, where he wouldn't see his mother. Some place he could stay till he could get to you, sir. It came to me in a heap. I seen my sister's was the place for him. At first I couldn't see how I could get her to see it. If I just went and told her the truth—that he was Veile's stepson—I knew right away she wouldn't have anything to do with it. She would have thought it was a crooked deal, after all he's done for us. And then I seen that if I told her the kid's folks are divorced, if I told her a story like this—I'd say to her, 'His father wants him kept away from his mother. His mother takes opium,' I'd say to her, 'and she'll give it to the kid if she gets him.' That would settle everything for her. Her first husband took drugs. That's why I knew she wouldn't stand for me going against Veile. He was dopy and I went down and I had to beat him up once when I seen how he was treating her. He got sick afterwards and said I'd hurt him, and Veile got a lawyer and fixed things up for us. My sister don't want to hear anything about opium since him. I planned it all out, how I'd tell him when he woke up.

"When he opened his eyes I says to him, 'I got it all planned, kiddo. I'll help you get away!' And then he begins right off. 'You're a liar!' he yells at me. 'You're on her side!' he yells. And I says to him, 'Now, you keep still, and don't you talk rough till you hear what I'm telling you,' I says to him. 'I got a scheme for you to hide safe till your father gets you,' I tells

him. But it wasn't any snap. I told him that. It wasn't for any ordinary millionaire kid. 'They're poor, and they don't hardly live in a house at all,' I says to him plain. 'Just a sort of a squatter's shack,' I says. And he says to me"—Bill stopped and looked at Bob, and then at Emily almost reverently —"he says to me: 'I don't care if they *are* poor; I like poor people. They sit around and talk to you,' he says. 'My uncle's poor He ain't got but two bathrooms in his house,' he tells me. And I says to him: 'My sister ain't that kind of poor. She ain't seen a bathroom for ten years. She washes in a old tub by the stove. And there's nobody to talk to within twenty miles.' I told him all that plain." He turned to Jim hastily. He came and sat down near him eagerly to make him, in some way, if that might be, comprehend what he was trying to say.

"My God, sir, I wish you'd seen that place! I wish you knew what it's like there. It ain't decent. My sister never done anything to deserve such luck. First that dope fiend, and then a man who likes to live in Colorado! I went to see how she was getting along once. A week, I went for. But I couldn't stick it out, if she did bring me up. I beat it after three days there. There wasn't a sound all that time. I just sat and listened. I had to listen that way in bed all night. I couldn't sleep. I thought I'd go dippy before I got away. She's got used to it, she says. She wouldn't leave him and come back with me. It's good for his health, she says. He *likes* it. He calls it God's country. Not cussing, or anything. I sent her a Victrola to make some noise when I got home. I tell you, sir, I'd rather live in Sing Sing in New York State, a year, than stand that place a month. And the kid stuck it out there for forty-seven days! You got to hand it to him for that.

"I told him plain I knew I couldn't stay there for nobody.

But he was different. He could do anything he took a notion. And he took that notion hard. I told him there wasn't a town for twenty miles. There wasn't a neighbor for six miles. And they wasn't neighbors, either. Just wops. 'If you want to hide,' I says to him plain, 'that's the place to do it in. It's the safest hiding place in the United States.' And he couldn't hardly wait till he got his clothes off. He'd slept with them on. For three nights. When he believed I meant it, he was for beating it to the train then and there. I couldn't hardly get him to wait till I was through. I told him it was the coldest place in the United States. I told him it was still enough to bust your ears. And all he says was, 'Where'd you put my suitcase?'

"He was only a kid, sir, and he had foolish ideas in his head. But I tell you there was something in it! If it had come to trial, and you'd 'a' showed the judge a picture of that hole in Colorado, and one of that place of Veile's on the Avenue there—if you'd of told the court the boy went to live in that place to get away from his mother, I bet the judge would of sat up and took notice! He'd of got to you, maybe.

"Of course, when I told the kid about the place, I seen clear enough *she* might find him there, even, with all the detectives in the place hunting for him—as if he'd done something! And I seen if she got him, and found out I'd helped him, I would be in for it. But I figured out she couldn't do anything to my sister if she didn't know who the kid was. And I was going to be in France a long time before she got home to make things hum. And if she did get me, she could only put me in jail. I didn't think Veile would stand for that. And if I did go to jail, the kid would of had his chance, once. He never had any chance in *that* house, you might say."

A kind of shiver went over the listeners. This man had loved

their child. He knew what he was talking about. Bob turned abruptly and stood looking out of the window. Jim pulled a sheet up toward his chin.

"Oh, you were *good* to him!" Emily murmured.

He glanced at her uneasily. "I never took to kids much," he said, simply. At his tone, tears came scalding again into her eyes. She realized the depth of this Bill's august bereavement. His nostrils quivered as he went on:

"When he got it through his head what I meant, I couldn't hardly hold him. I had to make him listen to me. I had it all planned careful. There was that cook and the caretaker to give the slip to. But they never came near him if they could help it. 'You'll have to act as if you're better,' I says to him. 'As if you was behaving. And I'll take you out for a walk, and get you some breakfast, and you'll eat it, too.' And he was ready to mind everything I said, then. And while he was eating in a chophouse, I went to Third Avenue and bought him some cheap clothes and a cheap grip, and all the things he needed at a sheeny's little joint. Long pants, I got him. And I said I'd call for them later. I wrote to my sister, but you can't tell when a letter'll get to her, it's so far from everything. I wanted my brother-in-law to meet the early-morning train, so there wouldn't be a lot of people seeing him get off. And I took him home and I made him lie down. I got the caretaker up to peek in and see him sleeping there at noon. 'He's all right now,' I says to him. 'He's cooled off. And he'll sleep three days, he's so tired,' I says to him. I made him pretend he was asleep, and when the man had snuck away, there the kid was, fast asleep, he was so tired! Like a baby! And when he woke up cool, I gave him a talking to. He was crazy to get started, as if it was a game. He wanted to dye his hair black. He wanted me to get

a false mustache! Just like a kid! And in the evening, we snuck out, and got into a taxi, and went for his things. I took him to a place, and he went and changed his clothes. I told him to take off his glasses, and not to put them on till he got there. And not to stick his head out that way, looking at things. And not to talk to anybody at all till he got there. And when he was ready—I wouldn't have known the kid myself! His pants was long, but not long enough. And I got him yellow shoes. He looked like some Swede lumberjack from Minnesota. And I give him enough money, and told him to buy a ticket to Detroit. And to wait there a day and go to Kansas City. And I got him a deck of cards, and a book on solitaire for when he got there first. And I sent him things from the mail-order house. That's where my sister gets her groceries. There ain't even a store near enough to go to! Gee! the kid went away happy! 'Bill,' he says to me, 'you're a good guy to help me like this!'" And suddenly tears welled out into the eyes under their puffy eyelids and rolled down his cheeks.

"And then I went back to the house, and pretended all the next day and night that the kid was in the room, behaving himself. And the next morning I went down and had a talk with the cook. And when I went back I let out a yell that he'd give me the slip. I called them in and showed them he wasn't there. And I made them swear not to tell I had left him alone a minute, and I fired the cook—with some extra—and wired Veile that he had gone to you, sir! Then I beat it to Washington. I knew he would be coming to New York by the first train. And I wired him from Washington, and beat it back to New York, bringing his car. I seen him the next day. He was mad! And I was sore myself. 'I told you this would happen!' I says to him. 'I wired you I wouldn't stay and take

the blame! I knew I'd get hell if I stayed. The kid's beat it to his father, and I'm going to the army. That's all the thanks I get for being your nursemaid,' I says. 'I stayed just to oblige you, and now I get this!' And I beat it. He begged me to go to California and take care of the kid out there with you, sir. I wouldn't listen to him. I was mad. I never wanted to take care of the kid all the time. It was too hard work, in that house! I wasn't strong enough. I had to sit and listen to history dope, half the night, pretending I wanted to learn, because he wouldn't learn no other way. And while he was sleeping in the morning I would be studying in the Public Library, reading myself blind, so's I could answer his questions some way when he woke up. I never had any schooling but night school, but the kid thought I was a wise guy. And it seemed like I couldn't bear to tell him I didn't know anything at all, you might say. He'd ask me things, and I'd pretend I was busy, and then I'd sneak out and read up. Or buy him a book. I was a chauffeur, but I hadn't time to look at a car, with that kid. Veile got a lot of phony drivers to drive for him. Even a woman, once. All of them knocking up my cars, and me never having time to keep them in right condition. 'Anybody can drive,' says Veile to me more than once. '*You* look after that kid!' And if I hadn't, who would of? I couldn't just let him stay locked up in his room all day alone, could I? And Veile raised my salary every time I tried to get out of it. It wasn't any snap, I can tell you. Tutors leaving as fast as they came. And the kid not speaking to anybody in the house but me, and breaking up the furniture.

"And then I seen it in the paper. . . . A bunch of us was talking on our bunks, and a guy came in with the paper. I didn't pay no attention to him, at first. And he handed it over

to me. 'They've found that millionaire's kid,' he says, just like that. 'He's dead.' And I seen it. . . .

"I just had a letter from my sister two days before, and she said he was well, and everything. She was baking him a lot of pies, she said, and he was eating everything she cooked for him, and behaving himself. And then I seen . . . about Salt Lake City. . . .

"Next morning I went to New York. I figured Swanker knew where the kid had been all the time. I gave him the best tip I could when he wanted to pump me for you, sir. I didn't know the kid hadn't written to you. I told him to write you, and to mail it to you from some place East. He said he couldn't, but I told him he was to. I supposed he had. I didn't know you were so—sick till Swanker told me. If she had of put it in the papers sooner that he could stay with you, everything would have been all right. She blames me and my sister and the school. She ought to blame herself. If she'd of let him go to you when he wanted to. . . .

"I seen Swanker, and he got it all out of me. I wanted him to do what he could for my sister, so she wouldn't get her into trouble. I seen right away what kind of a bird Swanker was. I seen he was wise to everything that had happened. 'You go and find out all you don't know from your sister,' he says to me, 'and you go and tell his folks everything. I'll pay your way,' he says. That made me sore, but I didn't say anything then. 'If she starts anything against you, I'll start more against her,' he says to me. 'I'll tell the world why the lad was hiding in a shack,' he says. 'Don't you be worried. You tell his folks all the truth,' he says. 'And I swear on the Bible, before witnesses, that for every month I let her keep you in jail for contributing to the delinquency of a minor, I'll pay you

ten thousand dollars,' he says. 'I've got the goods on her,' he says. 'She drove that boy away from home, and if she starts anything, I'm ready to tell the world how she done it,' he says. 'I told her his father was—sick,' he says, 'and she wouldn't do a thing for him! She'll like to see that in the papers,' he says. 'If she wants to start a fight, I'm ready for her.' He's the fiercest lawyer I ever saw, that bird!

"It wasn't any picnic to go and square myself with my sister. But I says to her, 'Well, if it wasn't opium, it was something a lot worse,' I says. 'And you done what you could to make the kid happy. He was better off with you than he was in New York, going crazy.' I couldn't tell her how things were there, exactly, but I told her some. So she wouldn't be sore at me. She hadn't ever suspected a thing about the boy. She hadn't seen a paper about him. But when I asked her particular, she said that one day as soon as the kid saw a paper that had just come, he stuck it in the fire by accident, he said, and it sort of put her out, for she hadn't seen it. It was a weekly she got sometimes, and maybe there had been something in it about him, she said. He was a good kid all the time he was there, she said. She liked to have him for company, and he ate everything she made for him. Cakes and things. . . . But her husband, he smelled a rat all the time, you might say. He's had some education, and he helped him some with the books I sent him. And he read to him. He seen there was something phony about the kid, the way he would never talk about his folks or where he had lived. But my sister said she never expected him to, with his mother taking opium, and everything.

"The kid stayed in that house forty-seven days. You got to hand it to him for that, sir. No common kid could of stuck it out a week. If you had seen the place—! And I bet he would

have stayed there till the case had come to trial, only he got sick. He had flu, maybe, or bronchitis. My sister did all she could for him. He laid around a week, too sick to say anything, with a bad throat. And then he got earache. That took the heart out of him, she said. He walked around all night, and she did what she could to cure him. And then his ear stopped, but he was sort of weak. And when he comes downstairs one morning, he says to her, 'I'm going to see my father to-day!' All of a sudden. Just like that. And she says to him, 'Your father's in France!' That's what I'd told her. And he says, 'No, he ain't. He's in California and he's sick. I didn't know how bad you feel when you're sick,' he says, 'and I'm going to see him, and I'll come right back. I come here once without my mother getting on to me,' he says, 'and I can do it again!' The kid didn't know how they was all laying for him, his picture posted in all the police stations in the country! And my sister told him he was too weak to go anywhere. He hadn't got well yet. But he wouldn't listen to her. You know how he was when he got his mind made up, sir. She tried to get him not to go. They couldn't take him that day, they told him, and he started off walking. So they called him back and hitched up. My sister said she cried after he was gone, she was so worried about him, having a cold—and everything. And she missed him for company.

"And then it would of been all right maybe, even if the bridge hadn't of been down. They got halfway to town and they couldn't get any further. It had been thawing, and the creek had been up, and the bridge was broke in two by the ice and them rocks that's everywhere out there. And he jumped out of the buggy and climbed up on what was left of it. And before my brother-in-law could say a word he seen how he

UPB

could get across, jumping on rocks and things. My brother said his hair stood on end to see him, and he kept begging him not to go on—not to get his feet wet. But he got across all right, wet to the waist. My brother said he called to him to wait and he would unhitch the horse and let him ride it to town. But it was all done so quick. He wouldn't take the old man's horse. That was like him. And there he was on the other side of the stream, wet to the waist. And if he had of come back, there wasn't any place near to get dry at. My brother-in-law called to him to stop at the next place and get dry. But he just told him not to worry about him, and started walking down the road. He had nine miles to go to the station. And he had his suitcase.

"Well, he never stopped at any house to get dry. We inquired. Nobody'd seen him except a man with an eating-house. The kid went in there in the evening about nine-thirty, just before the train was coming, and ordered two hams and eggs. He hadn't had anything to eat since breakfast, I figure. My brother had the lunch in the buggy. And the man in the eating-house remembered him because his hand had shook so he couldn't drink his coffee. He spilled half of it, and ordered more. And he thought at the time he must have been having a chill. I figured the kid was so afraid he would be caught, he didn't even go in any place. Just hung around in the dark some place till it was train time with his clothes wet. And he hadn't done a thing, and he had to sneak around like a thief."

There was a long stillness.

"I remember the first time I ever took any notice of the kid. After Veile was married, he used to want to hang around the car and watch me working at it. I always ordered him out of the shop. I never took much to kids. And one day I fired

him out—he was a little shaver then, funny looking—with them glasses, and in a minute he comes back and tries to slip something into my hand. And I looked, and it was a five-dollar bill! It was just at Christmas time. 'I'll give you this if you'll let me put that tire on,' he says, polite, to me. I felt funny—kind of. And I let him sit and watch me and hand me things. I didn't take the money, of course. And after that, I let him do things. *He* never lost a tool or mussed things up. He wasn't like a common kid playing around with your things. And pretty soon they couldn't pry him loose from my shop. The whole lot of them was always coming down and hauling him upstairs, and he was always giving them the slip and coming back. His mother didn't like it a little bit. I don't blame her for that. But she didn't take him right. If she'd of let him alone a little, to do what he wanted to— It didn't hurt him much to get his hands dirty. And when he found out that was what she didn't like, I've seen that kid rub grease into his fingers, when he went upstairs, if his hands weren't dirty enough, to raise a row. He was contrary with her. And he just kept getting worse.

"When I seen he was locked up all the time for misbehaving, I cleared out a place, and bought a junked Ford, and took it to pieces, and told him to go to it. I heard a guy say that's what they done in the army school. There wasn't a screw left in its place when I gave it to him. And he put her together. I didn't help him much. And I took it all to pieces, and got an old truck, and mixed the parts of the two together, and let him sort them out and put them all together. He sat there happy as a king when they would let him alone. He'd sing, even. Maybe you won't believe it, but I tell you I've heard the kid singing in there. Nobody dared to come after him. I would take him

back to his room and lock him up when I went out. And finally he had those old wrecks all put together, sitting side by side in the little room over the garage. And nobody but him and me ever went in there. I gave him a key to it. It tickled him to have the key himself. And he wanted to paint them up. They wasn't worth it, but it cheered him up to be working. I got him paint. He painted the Ford bright blue on the outside. And the inside right over the old worn-out upholstery he painted red. You never saw such a looking bus in your life! And then he painted the others till they looked like circus wagons. That was just before he went West. I suppose they're sitting there locked in that room right now.

"And that's how he come to go to that school. He took the tutor in to show them to him the last time he came, before he went to France. He wasn't a tutor really. He was one of these here college professors. I got acquainted with him in the Library when I was trying to hunt up stuff for the kid to read, I seen right away they was two of a kind. He took the kid right, always. He didn't ask him to read story books and things like that. And when he seen those buses all painted up and sitting there together, with their engines hitting right, and not a door or a window big enough for one of them to get into the place by, and I told him the kid had done it, he sends the kid to bed and beat it upstairs for the boss, and has a long talk with him. He told him about the school. I don't know—if he'll see about this in France. I ought to write him, maybe. How can I write him? He thought a lot of the kid—"

He left his place at the foot of Jim's bed and went and picked up his hat from beside his chair. He stood awkwardly, fumbling it around and around in his hand. He turned at length,

and looked at Emily. He stood looking at her reverently, and as he looked a tender smile moved his lips.

"He certainly thought a lot of you, madam," he said. "He used to talk a lot about you. He said to me one day, he said to me"— But Bill was afraid, apparently, to take the words of the boy's love on his lips, for he finished, lamely, "He certainly talked a lot about you."

He stood there, and the smile faded into a grimness that he seemed to find intolerable, for he exclaimed, abruptly:

"I want a smoke, if you'll excuse me sir. I'll be around this afternoon, if there's anything you would want to ask me about." He got as far as the door, and hesitated, unsatisfied. The three of them were watching him with compassion.

"If I'd of let him go into the navy—!" he cried. He couldn't go on. He turned abruptly and left them. Bob followed him out.

That evening Emily and Bob had a long talk with Bill, all of them speaking more freely than they had been able to before Jim. The next day Bill left for the East, and his going made Jim's departure seem nearer. The story of Bronson's last days —the pity of it—had drawn the three Kenworthys into one consciousness. Jim no longer dwelt alone in his grief.

They were together in the hospital room that afternoon, grieving. Their silence was broken only by response to some half-articulate cry of Jim's—some recollection of the boy's dear absurdities—some moan of resentment against his fate. At length Bob could stand the poignancy of the hour no longer. He got up abruptly and left the room.

Emily continued to sit perfectly still. She seemed remote from all the world—except Jim—far away from even the sounds in the quiet hall outside the door—in a hushed place

where her heart was breaking because she could do nothing for him. He lay still, his eyes closed. She sat there in agony so long—at last she thought that he must be asleep. She rose to tiptoe out. He heard her going, and opened his eyes.

"Emily!"

"Yes, Jim." She bent to take the hand he tried to lift to her.

"I got him back. He was *mine.*"

"Yes, Jim." Her tears wet the hand she was kissing.

"Do you know how I got him back?"

"No. I wondered, of course."

"*You* gave me my son, Emily. *You* gave him to me."

"Did I?" She managed to speak soothingly. It occurred to her that he was growing delirious.

"It was your *goodness.*"

She couldn't endure his going—his dying—the passing of her share of beauty. "Oh, I loved him so, Jim—for *your* sake! You *know*—Jim. I wanted—" She knelt and hid her face in his arm, and gave way to her sorrow.

"I know. *We* know. It had to be this way. You had to be—yourself—thank God! It was because you were so—straight—he believed—"

She understood then, and cried: "Oh, *no!* I'm not good! Don't, Jim! Don't—"

He knew she meant, "Don't die! Don't leave me!" She felt his hand on her hair. He was speaking again. She lifted her head to catch the words. Then she realized that her renunciation was blessing him even unto death.

"*You* gave him to me. They couldn't scare my son that way. They couldn't scare *him!*"

THE END

3 0112 00488 2392